Wrong Wrongness

The Vagaries of the *Ought* and the Quandary of 'Progress'
between
Hyperkantianism
and
Historical Materialism

David Bremner

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the joint degree by cotutelle
of Doctor of Philosophy / doctorat de recherche in Social and Political Thought / Philosophy

112,995 words

University of Kent
Université Paris VIII Vincennes-Saint-Denis

Supervisors: Dr. Iain Mackenzie and Prof. Pierre Cassou-Noguès

Submission date: 21st September 2019

THÈSE DE DOCTORAT PAR COTUTELLE – RÉSUMÉ SUBSTANTIEL FRANÇAIS

NOVEMBRE 2019

David Bremner
Université Paris VIII Vincennes-Saint-Denis
University of Kent, Royaume-Uni
Philosophie / Pensée politique et sociale

FAUX FAUSSÉ

LES CHICANES DU *DEVOIR-ÊTRE* ET LE DILEMME DU « PROGRÈS »

ENTRE HYPERKANTISME ET MATÉRIALISME HISTORIQUE

Table de matières

A. Aperçu [p. 1]

B. Stratégie méthodologique [p. 4]

C. Deux problèmes

* *Le problème du* devoir-être * [p. 6] / * *Le problème du Nouveau* [p. 14] *

D. Abrégé des Sections I et II, Chapitres 1-4. Problématisation

Di. - Sommaire de la Section I

* *Le « transcendantal » et les « universaux »* * [p. 22]

* *L'« hyperkantisme » de François Laruelle et les taches* * [p. 22]

Dii. - Sommaire de la Section II

* *Compossibiliser contre le « Mythe du Donné » les thèses d'Adorno de 1938 sur la musique et la forme de la marchandise* * [p. 24]

* *Le temps et les temporalités* * [p. 34]

E. Abrégé des Sections III et IV, Chapitres 5-8. Pistes de solution

Ei. - Sommaire de la Section III

* *« Limite », « borne », et un paradoxe du* devoir-être * [p. 34]

* *Réitération quasiment exhaustive, pour ses repères clés, du Chapitre 6, intitulé LA NON-IDENTITÉ DE L'IDENTITÉ : HEGEL, BADIOU, ET L'INFINI QUANTITATIF* * [p. 35]

Eii. - Sommaire de la Section IV

**Le temps et la médiatisation* * [p. 59]

**La torsion entre Imre Lakatos et Marx & Engels* * [p. 59]

F. Conclusion

* *La Loi* devrait-*elle* être *?* [p. 74] * / **Le temps controversé* * [p. 78]

G. Indications bibliographiques, ainsi qu'extra-philosophiques, pour chaque partie [p. 83]

A. Aperçu

Cette thèse étudie les ressources philosophiques offertes par G. W. F. Hegel, d'une part et Wilfrid Sellars, de l'autre, afin de déceler ce que ces deux philosophes, placés en un attelage commun– de manière querelleuse mais mutuellement éclairante – pourraient

contribuer à une reformulation fertile de deux problèmes philosophiques fondamentaux, que nous pouvons nommer comme suit : (a) le problème du *devoir-être*, et (b) le problème du Nouveau, (que nous appellerons occasionnellement le problème du « progrès »).

La présente thèse[1] avance l'idée que la nouveauté et le Nouveau, en art comme en science, doivent se concevoir *qualitativement* et de façon *antagonique*. L'utilité chiffrable est remise en cause comme critère de réussite. Cependant, l'*inutilité* est inséparable d'un concept d'*usage*. Cette conclusion est produite par le biais d'une explication dialectique de la déterminité en tant que telle comme une « intériorisation » qui se déploie *à travers l'extériorité*, au lieu de s'opposer à elle.

(a) Nous étudions une présence insistante dans la trajectoire de la philosophie post-hégélienne, présence un peu délaissée par les commentateurs, qui tient à ce que le « *devoir-être* » – compris comme un décalage de la pensée à l'égard de ce qui *est*, sa non-servitude au joug de l'état de choses existant, qui indiquerait qu'elle peut s'écarter de cet état – doit être maintenu, et ce, malgré certaines tendances propres à Hegel lui-même. Une justification parmi d'autres à l'appui de cette insistance, est que, dans le sillage de Kant, une *opacité* épistémique a été introduite entre (ou *comme*) connaissance et connu. D'où un constructivisme sellarsien à l'égard des abstractions, de telle sorte que la connaissance du triangle ne saurait s'obtenir *grâce à* une quelconque *essence préétablie de la triangularité*.[2] D'où également la motivation d'une quête de repérage des brefs instants chez Hegel où l'*effectivité* menace de se détacher de l'*actualité*. Le raisonnement ici présenté fait appel à l'idée que le savoir est dépendant du caractère illusoire de la

[1] À chaque fois qu'une référence aux détails du texte original est nécessaire, ce dernier, qui a été rédigé en anglais, sera identifié par les initiales *WW*, en fonction de son titre anglais : *Wrong Wrongness : the Vagaries of the* Ought *and the Quandary of 'Progress' between Hyperkantianism and Historical Materialism*.

[2] Le constructivisme sellarso-hégélien que nous tentons d'esquisser fait écho à l'observation de Guiseppe Longo, selon laquelle la deuxième définition d'Euclide – à savoir, « une ligne est une longueur sans épaisseur » – se trouve admise par le biais d'une *décision* qui est sous-déterminée par n'importe lequel donné perceptible. Comme l'écrit Longo, « même le filament d'une toile d'araignée possède de l'épaisseur ; il est donc impossible de tirer de l'expérience sensorielle cette idée de la constitution structurelle de la ligne ». (Giuseppe Longo, 'The Consequences of Philosophy', *Glassbead* Site 0, 'Castalia, the Game of Ends and Means', 2016, http://www.glass-bead.org/article/the-consequences-of-philosophy/?lang=enview. Les traductions des citations en français où le titre du texte cité est donné en anglais sont toutes les nôtres.)

substantialité métaphysique, et de ce que la « spontanéité » (au sens kantien) est dépendante de l'« externalité » hétéronome et de l'« étrangement » social (*Entfremdung*[3]), pour soutenir en à partir de là, qu'il y a bien un décalage entre *devoir-être* et *être*.

(b) Puisant dans les premières parties de la *Science de la logique* d'Hegel afin de s'emparer de la *forme logique* de la *qualité* qui s'y dessine, notre thèse explore une conception de l'innovation comme dépassement qui l'exprime par *contradiction* ou *négation déterminée* de l'Ancien. On y défend l'idée que le Nouveau qui effectue un « bon infini », selon les termes d'Hegel, s'exprime sous la forme d'une *torsion*[4], et suggère que

[3] « Étrangement » est la traduction préférée d'Henri Lefebvre de ce terme allemand, situé dans un fil qui se trace, à quelques ajustements près, le long du rôle qu'il a joué – par l'*Entfremdung* – d'Hegel à Marx. Le choix semble être préférable à « aliénation ». La connotation portée par *Entfremdung* d'un assujettissement à un pouvoir séparé de – et « tyrannisant » – la pratique – même si c'est la pratique elle-même qui l'a mis au jour – n'est pas forcément présent dans le terme *Entäusserung*. Cela se défend-t-il que celui-ci est un *moment du même dialectique* que celui-là, une dialectique qui se révèle bel et bien de l'aliénation ; toutefois, *Entäusserung* – « extériorisation » ou « dessaisissement » – ne porte pas de soupçon péjoratif. L'intérêt de l'entrelacement de l'assujettissement d'avec la liberté s'évanouit dès lors que la distinction des deux idées s'efface.

[4] Il s'agit d'un terme de Jean Hyppolite partagé par d'Alain Badiou (vers 1980). Cependant, le fait que chez Hegel la seule forme de la différence qualitative simple s'articule dans l'idée d'une pression antagonique se voit de manière préliminaire dans ce passage où il essaye d'extraire un brin de vérité des jeux étymologiques d'un philosophe de la Renaissance qu'il admire, mais pas uniformément :

> La « *Qualierung* » ou « *Inqualierung* » – une expression de la philosophie de *Jacob Böhme*, une philosophie allant dans la profondeur, mais dans une profondeur trouble – signifie le mouvement d'une qualité (la qualité acide, amère, ignée, etc.) dans elle-même, pour autant que, dans sa nature négative (dans sa « *Qual* » [son « *tourmant* »]), elle se pose et s'affermit à partir d'autre chose, est d'une façon générale, en elle-même, le non-repos d'elle-même, suivant lequel elle se produit et se conserve seulement dans le combat. (G. W. F. Hegel, *Science de la logique. Livre premier – L'être. Textes de 1812 et 1832* [*SLÊ*], tr. Bernard Bourgeois, Paris, Vrin, 2015, p. 155. Passage non-cité dans *WW*.)

ce Nouveau est lié à l'articulation d'*irréversibilités logiques nouvelles*. Ainsi l'impératif de dépasser l'ancien pourrait éventuellement être arraché aux griffes puériles de la rubrique néolibérale de l'« optimisation » quantitative. Une conséquence serait que *la musique* est *faite, non pas trouvée*[5] et donc – dans un gimmick qui ne peut que paraître grinçant – que le chant des oiseaux n'entre pas d'emblée dans le champ de la musique.

Nous argumentons qu'une telle position, qui pourrait à la limite se dire « sellarso-hégélienne », sert à sauvegarder la perspicacité d'Imre Lakatos quant à l'impératif de dépassement dans les sciences naturelles – tout en veillant à repousser tout moindre fétiche de croissance linéaire. Un tournant tellement hégélien que celui pris par cette argumentation – qui, bien qu'hétéroclite, recourt néanmoins à la *négativité se-rapportant-à-soi* – se dote de sa motivation à travers une révision adornienne du fétichisme de la marchandise. Cette révision met le doigt sur la *production abstraite*, lorsqu'elle est érigée en source souhaitée de critères concrets de réussite, comme étant à la suite de ce que Sellars nomme le « Mythe du Donné ». Alexandre Koyré s'engage à défier le paradigme d'incommensurabilité (qui pourtant revendique son influence) par le biais d'une historiographie des contradictions conceptuelles pleinement *antagonique*. Ces réflexions mènent à des questionnements concernant le temps, les temporalités, et l'atemporel.

B. Stratégie méthodologique

L'approche déployée par ce travail est philosophiquement synoptique, visant une unité conceptuelle d'ensemble plutôt qu'un parcours exhaustif de la pensée ou des luttes intellectuelles de chaque auteur étudié. Néanmoins, et étant donné que le moteur de la recherche est fourni par des *problèmes*, afin d'éviter (maximalement, ou

---

Que cette idée ne se solidifie pas, de manière complaisante, en un « calfeutré » *garanti métaphysique* d'encore et encore de nouveauté est un souci clé pour Badiou, ainsi qu'il l'est pour l'étude ici résumée. Tout en répondant au pessimisme qui fut celui d'Adorno des années 30s, la Section II de l'étude cherche à allier Lacan à Sellars dans le but d'argumenter que la négation déterminée ne se réduit *pas forcément* à une domestication de l'angoisse (ni du titillement) de l'insu.

[5] La proposition qui est présentée pour la considération de la lectrice ou du lecteur impliquerait que le musicien non-réactionnaire (du moins en première instance) ne cherche pas *simplement*, ou pas *seulement*, à faire croître un paramètre chiffrable (« plus ou moins palpitant ? » ; « encore dix boîtes de nouveauté à stocker dans l'entrepôt ! »), mais plutôt, lors d'une réussite, bâtit une forme et un contenu qui *nie (qualitativement)* les propriétés *qualitatives* décaties de la musique Ancienne et les shibboleths idéologiques qui pèsent sur cette négation même.

asymptotiquement – il s'agit en dernière instance d'un vœu pieux) de perdre du temps en testant des solutions *ad hoc*, qui auraient éventuellement été préalablement démenties, le but de rigueur et de cohérence est poursuivi à travers une série d'incursions dans l'histoire de la philosophie et de la théorie critique. Ces « razzias » sont entreprises afin d'obtenir des gains d'intelligibilité pour les deux problèmes clés *considérés dans leurs valences contemporaines*, ce qui revient à dire, inversement, que les creusements historiographiques se laissent guider par les deux problèmes.[6]

L'étude tire un grand élan de problématisation, et une puissance conceptuelle, à partir de la philosophie française contemporaine, sans reculer devant des défis et contributions pertinentes provenant d'ailleurs.[7] Thématiquement, analyser la science à côté de la musique permet de s'intéresser à la détermination non-triviale de leur *différence*, une détermination qui, suggérons-nous en nous appuyant sur les propos d'Adorno, doit se concrétiser comme « anti-pythagoricienne », puisque c'est bel et bien Pythagore qui a lié la musique aux mathématiques, de telle sorte que certaines de leurs propriétés se voient éclaircies alors que d'autres se trouvent obscurcies. Il s'agit d'une question qui touche en plein cœur – bien que de manière complexe – le problème vénérable de l'articulation de la qualité avec la quantité, ou – en jargon technique hégélien – de la différence intérieurement intra-réfléchie, « réfléchie-en-soi », avec l'*indifférence* extérieure.

En effet, que l'étude s'attache à enquêter sur l'*opacité* ne peut que façonner en retour sa méthode. Le type d'opacité interrogée ici est, en premier chef, celle qui se loge entre *l'acte pratique* propre à la pensée et *ce que* cet acte détermine dans l'idéalité de la conscience-de-soi réfléchie. Il s'agit selon nous précisément du problème soulevé par Jean Cavaillès lorsqu'il formule une critique ayant pour cible Kant, critique que nous

[6] Une telle stratégie s'inspire des travaux de Danielle Macbeth, de Gérard Lebrun, et de Béatrice Longuenesse.

[7] Pour que l'usage d'Hegel et Sellars soit justifié, ainsi que mis à l'épreuve, les penseurs clés auxquels l'étude se réfère sont : à l'égard de la conceptualisation pure des concepts, François Laruelle et Alain Badiou ; concernant la musique, ainsi que les dialectiques hégélienne et marxienne, Theodor W. Adorno ; à l'égard des questionnements psychanalytiques, Jacques Lacan et Rebecca Comay ; dans la réflexion sur les sciences naturelles, Alexandre Koyré et Imre Lakatos (tous les deux hégéliens, plus ou moins, des problèmes se présentant – nous argumentons – lorsque « moins ») ; et, à l'égard de la pensée mathématique, Albert Lautman et Jean Cavaillès.

estimons cruciale, et qui trouve des résonances profondes chez Sellars. Dans la philosophie kantienne, en effet,

> Entendement et raison, si abstraitement qu'on les décrive, restent pouvoirs de la conscience irréductible et en tant que tel sont caractérisés par la propriété d'une auto-illumination intérieure. L'acte est présent à soi-même et se peut ainsi déterminer.[8]

Faire face à l'opacité impliquée par cette critique exige, souhaitons-nous suggérer, d'abandonner toute méthode qui voudrait déplier sereinement des théorèmes à partir d'un principe premier. Elle entraîne un mode d'exposition qui est, initialement, non-linéaire et saccadé, main dans la main avec les tâtonnements déséquilibrés nécessaires pour rendre justice aux problèmes conceptuels que l'on souhaite traiter. Ainsi les Sections I à III de l'étude sont composées d'une série de circuits de découverte permettant à la recherche de cartographier les obstacles à attaquer et de récupérer les ressources requises pour le faire. Ces ressources et ces problèmes nuancés sont dans la Section IV ramassés et tenues dans une tension synthétique, d'où la génération de l'argument clé offert par la thèse.

C. Deux problèmes

(a) Le problème du *devoir-être*.

Ce problème peut à notre sens se décomposer en deux aspects : d'abord, (ai.) la question du « décalage entre *être* et *devoir-être* », et, deuxièmement, (aii.) la question du désaccord entre le *devoir-être* en tant que « *comme si* » et le *devoir-être* en tant qu'*effectif*.

(ai. Le décalage entre *être* et *devoir-être*.) La question que nous souhaitons poser ici revient à demander sous quelles conditions la déclaration *les choses ne sont pas telles qu'elles devraient être* devient cohérente. Ne faut-il pas au contraire admettre que ce qui *est*, *est*, et qu'il n'y a aucune justification qui pourrait se manifester en faveur de sa transformation ? Un tel abandon, ne se payera-t-il pas au prix fort, celui d'un quiétisme politique et une docilité généralisée ? En effet, nous avons affaire ici à une variante du problème du nihilisme tel qu'il est formulé par Nietzsche. Il s'agit de savoir si on peut, ou non, tenir une réponse non-quiétiste à ce problème de nihilisme. Y a-t-il un argument

[8] Jean Cavaillès, *Sur la logique et la théorie de la science*, dirs. Georges Canguilhem & Charles Ehresmann, Paris, Vrin, 2008 [1942], p. 18-19.

avec lequel on peut soutenir qu'une potentialité non-actualisée soit cachée de manière latente dans les pratiques des « créatures échangeant des concepts »[9], *sans* recourir à l'affirmation de cette potentialité via des stipulations-par-décret aristotéliciennes ou heideggériennes ? Car, à l'instar du matérialisme historique de Marx et Engels, toute potentialité non-actuelle doit pouvoir se déduire d'un conditionnement *impur* qui le contraint.

Notre recherche poursuit une piste de réponse, s'immisçant dans la critique entreprise par Sellars de ce qu'il nomme « le Mythe du Donné »[10], et proposant que la facticité *des propriétés de l'opérativité de la connaissance elle-même* – au premier chef, sa *négativité* – tranche dans le vif de la circularité vicieuse qui s'apparente invariablement à toute tentative de réifier la « Volonté » en une force quasi-métaphysique d'expansion et de désir-de-soi. Si le moindre bout du perçu sensible ou déterminité discursivement intelligible, du simple fait d'avoir d'accéder à la connaissance, présuppose toute une batterie de rapports d'inférence entre des concepts qui sont déjà, de manière obscure, en force, il s'ensuit alors que la connaissance ne peut qu'être « une entreprise se corrigeant d'elle-même » [11] qui, dès qu'elle s'amorce, se trouve criblée d'un arbitraire sous-déterminé par n'importe quel donné.

---

[9] La traduction choisie par une équipe de rédaction dirigée par Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel pour *concept-mongering creatures*, une expression anglaise de Robert Brandom, qui adapte avec créativité, en le verbalisant, le terme *fishmonger*, « poisson-ier-ière » (cf. Robert Brandom, *Rendre Explicite. Raisonnement, représentation et engagement discursif – Première partie*, traduit sous la direction d'Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel, Paris, Éditions de Cerf, 2010 [1994], p. 31). La conceptualisation entreprise par Brandom de l'agir pratique qui sous-tend la normativité nous intéresse, mais (dans la première sous-section de notre huitième Chapitre) nous nous efforçons à critiquer la présupposition de *transparence* sous-entendue par ce que nous appelons son « libéralisme conciliatoire ».

[10] Une critique qui, dans le sommaire de la Section II, se dessinera dans toute la continuité – nonobstant certains doutes de Sellars à l'égard d'Hegel – qu'elle tient avec la critique hégélienne de la « certitude sensible ».

[11] Sellars écrit que la métaphore d'une « fondation » ou d'un « fondement » sur lequel le savoir serait censé ultimement s'appuyer

> est trompeuse en raison de de son caractère statique. Elle paraît nous contraindre à devoir choisir entre l'image d'un éléphant reposant sur une tortue (qui donc supporte la tortue ?) et celle d'un grand serpent hégélien se mordant la

Il y a des lecteurs d'Hegel qui concluent que sa mission de « relever » (c'est-à-dire, supprimer *et* conserver ; terme à préciser dans les parties [C.aii.] et [*Ei.*] ci-dessous) ou bien de *réconcilier* les contradictions sur lesquelles il insiste dans le mouvement de la pensée se réduit au but de renfermer précipitamment le moindre écart entre *être* et *devoir-être*. Mais le propos ici sera d'argumenter que le sort du *devoir-être* chez Hegel s'avère pour l'œil averti bien plus compliqué. Cela se constate par le fait que Hegel s'inspire, en partie, de Platon. Chez ce dernier, n'est-ce pas la *norme* du Vrai qui permet à Socrate de jeter le trouble sur les opinions répandues en *refusant* de les accepter comme évidentes ? Que la *norme* soit ainsi liée, en résumé, au fait d'énoncer un « non ! » implacable suggère qu'elle s'apparente elle-aussi à une *opacité* ni claire ni distincte : négative. Or, Sellars est, en grande partie, un penseur de la normativité, et ce dans un sens entièrement non-moral. Pour lui, c'est une condition de l'effectivité de la connaissance que sa pratique se tienne à des *règles d'inférence*, ou qu'elle les bafoue – ce qui implique qu'il y ait des normes à bafouer.[12] Ainsi, le thème de la norme peut valoir comme moyen de soulever la

> queue (où donc commence-t-il ?). Aucune n'est acceptable. La connaissance empirique, de même que son extension sophistiquée, la science, est en effet rationnelle non pas du fait qu'elle possèderait un *fondement*, mais parce qu'elle est une entreprise se corrigeant d'elle-même, et pouvant mettre en péril *n'importe quelle* affirmation, quoique pas *toutes* à la fois. (W. Sellars, *Empirisme et philosophie de l'esprit*, tr. Fabien Cayla, Éditions de l'éclat, 1992 [1956], 82-83.)

Cependant, le pressentiment que rejeter la « circularité mauvaise » ne peut pas revenir à rejeter Hegel *en bloc* est un principe moteur important pour l'étude ici résumée.

[12] De manière cruciale, chez Sellars c'est sur le plan de la socialité que les « règles » dont il s'agit s'instituent :

> [C]omme nous le savons aujourd'hui, il y a de bonnes raisons de convenir que si la réalité est bien la « cause » de la pensée conceptuelle humaine se la représentant, on ne saurait assimiler ce rôle causal au conditionnement que pourrait en principe exercer l'environnement sur un individu sans la médiation de la famille et de la communauté. La conception à la Robinson Crusoé voulant que le monde engendre directement chez l'individu la pensée conceptuelle pèche par excès de simplicité. [...] Il a fallu attendre Hegel pour qu'on reconnaisse le rôle de médiation essentiel que joue le groupe. S'il nous est facile de voir en quoi les cadres conceptuels immanents à un individu et le transcendant sont un phénomène social et si nous discernons aujourd'hui dans l'image même que nous

« violence » de l'obligation ainsi que de son refus éventuel, « violence » qui ne s'esquive pas aisément.[13] Nous nous efforcerons ci-dessous d'indiquer plus dans les détails sur la manière de lire Sellars à travers un filtre hégélien, et Hegel à travers un filtre sellarsien, et sur ce qu'une telle lecture permet de défendre l'idée que l'écart entre *devoir-être* et *être* ne se referme pas nettement chez Hegel. L'enjeu est précisément celui du décalage opaque

---

> nous faisons de l'homme une reconnaissance implicite de cette dimension, reste qu'il a fallu attendre le dix-neuvième siècle pour que ce trait de l'image manifeste soit, même de manière inadéquate, pris en compte.
>
> [...] [L]e caractère essentiellement social de la pensée conceptuelle apparaît clairement si l'on songe qu'on ne saurait penser hors de normes communes d'exactitude et de pertinence, normes reliant ce que *je* pense *en effet* à ce que *doit* penser *quiconque*. Car il n'y a pas de pensée rationnelle sans opposition entre « je » et « quiconque ». (W. Sellars, « La philosophie et l'image scientifique de l'homme », tr. Yves Bouchard & Dominique Boucher, dans dir. Denis Fisette & Pierre Poirier, *Philosophie de l'esprit. Psychologie du sens commun et sciences de l'esprit*, Paris, Vrin, 2013 [1960], p. 54-115, p. 78-79. Passage partiellement cité dans *WW*.)

Il faut garder à l'esprit que Sellars raisonne ici de manière dialectique : *quiconque* n'est pas un idéal qui serait doté d'un contenu positivement solide, mais bien plutôt le corollaire de la prise de conscience que ce que *je* suis en train de faire soit, *éventuellement*, « dans le faux ». Le *quiconque* devient la cible de mon *devoir-être* seulement lorsque je me rends compte qu'*il n'y jamais de garant métaphysiquement assuré que je vais réussir à faire ce que j'ai envie de faire, ni que j'arrive à me sélectionner un but qui effectuera un vrai dépassement (en langue psychanalytique, une vraie « sublimation »)*. (Ce qui n'est point balayer le rôle constitutif et *réel* joué par l'*autre* dans l'institution de la « légalité » ou de la normativité en tant que telle – ni le rôle de l'autre dans la genèse de la conscience-de-soi en tant que telle.) Il serait intéressant d'articuler ce que dit Sellars ici avec les termes lacaniens, s'agissant du phantasme inconscient, de l'« Idéal du moi » – l'image que j'aimerais atteindre, la personne qu'aimerais que les autres pensent que je suis – et le « Je-idéal » – le regard de l'Autre que je tente de satisfaire ou impressionne –, afin d'observer les partages *ainsi que les décalages, ou même les coups de becs*. Certes, il ne peut pas y avoir de superposition simple : Sellars parle de la faculté de *raison* dans son *autonomie* kantienne-« rationaliste », et là-dessus il est plutôt optimiste. Cela étant dit, dans notre troisième Chapitre nous découvrons le résultat étonnant que Lacan peut se prêter à *atténuer* le pessimisme incité auprès de certains par Marx.

[13] Cf. François Châtelet, *Platon*, Gallimard, 1965.

entre l'idéalité et l'acte qui la détermine (de façon auto-aveuglée). Même s'il s'agit d'une tendance chez Hegel à rebours des intentions plus lucidement exprimées dans ses listes de tâches, on peut affirmer que la Loi de nécessité conceptuelle que les absolutisations hégéliennes visent à articuler – à travers la négativité pleinement auto-supprimante, pleinement « relevée », et donc atemporellement auto-équilibrée – pourrait très bien se révéler avoir comme condition des déterminations boiteuses, « impérieusement impératives »[14], et instituée de façon sordide (même au sein des démarches purement épistémiques ; point qui s'expliquera à travers l'aspect [aii.] ci-dessous), plutôt qu'étant instituée avec le « glamour » hypocrite d'idole théologique et mielleusement rassurante à laquelle Hegel se voit trop souvent réduit – selon nous à tort. Mais plus intéressant encore, l'inverse de ce point pousse à se poser la question de savoir si la boue du fini chancelant, assujettie à l'impérieusement impératif, ne doit tout de même pas – sous peine d'un matérialisme vulgaire à la suite du Mythe du Donné – accueillir l'éclat de la négativité se-rapportant-à-soi.

(aii. – Le *devoir-être* comme « *comme si* » vs. le *devoir-être* comme *effectif*.) Le second aspect du problème du *devoir-être* concerne la bataille entre ceux qui conçoivent le *devoir-être seulement comme idéal régulateur* (Kant et Fichte) et ceux qui croient qu'il est *pleinement opératif*. Le devoir moral kantien, capturé dans l'« impératif catégorique », ne peut jamais se réaliser pleinement, puisque Kant s'était voué à balayer toute fin qui comporterait un contenu positif, et se trouve donc obligé de s'emparer d'une « loi », ou bien d'une « grille », *purement formelle*, par le biais de laquelle repousser les désirs et les impulsions causalement déterminées, « pathologiques ». Aux yeux de Hegel, Kant se trouve ainsi irrémédiablement renvoyé dans un « mauvais infini » de non-satisfaction et d'attente incessamment reportée. Chez les commentateurs, et surtout chez ceux qui en

[14] « Impérieusement impératif » est la traduction choisie par la susmentionnée équipe de rédaction dirigée par Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel pour *fraught with ought*, une formule anglaise lourde de sens de *Sellars* (cf. R. Brandom, *Rendre Explicite*, traduit sous la direction d'Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel, p. 69). Le *ought*, c'est le *devoir-être* (« tu devrais faire la vaisselle » se dira, éventuellement, *you ought to do the washing up*), alors que le *fraught* avec lequel rime cet *ought* peut signifier non seulement « semé » – en sens de « semé d'embûches » – ou même, à la limite, « criblé » – en sens de « criblé de balles » – *mais également* « crispant » ou « crispé », en sens d'« angoissant » ou d'« angoissé ».

suivent la critique hégélienne, l'on a fait grand cas du sadomasochisme qui peut se diagnostiquer sur ce principe.

> Une telle faim resurgie dans la sphère pratique dans le « devoir froid » qui, contraint à se satisfaire de lui-même pour sa seule source de jouissance, finit en s'abandonnant à ronger ses propres vœux pieux – un « dernier morceaux dans l'estomac, pas encore digéré » – et exhibe ainsi tous les symptômes de conversion typique de l'idéal ascétique : les termes d'Hegel sont, comme toujours, prophétiquement nietzschéens.[15]

Kant a proscrit que l'effectivité soit attribuée à quelque chose en particulier, pas même au *devoir-être* par le biais duquel l'acte se lie à une règle, puisqu'une telle attribution transgresserait à ses yeux les conditions d'expérience possible en voulant parler de manière concrètement porteuse-de-contenus-cognitifs des noumènes inconnaissables. Chez Kant, l'actualité – ce qui revient à dire, dans ce contexte, l'effectivité – n'est qu'une modalité qui s'applique aux jugements subsumant et déterminant les propriétés de telles facticités spatio-temporelles que nous allons aborder *toujours seulement d'un point de vue extérieurement écarté* de ces facticités elles-mêmes.[16] La question de l'actualité de l'acte cognitif qui aborde les propriétés des apparences est proscrite. Selon Hegel, Kant dés-actualise le *devoir-être* du même coup qu'il calcifie métaphysiquement *la possibilité abstraite*, car les *a priori* rigides kantiens, qui sont censés fonder la connaissance légitime, figent *la subjectivité* dans une transcendance subrepticement à la fois actuelle et inactuelle : « dualiste » par rapport à la chose-en-soi. Hegel quant à lui ne croit pas du tout qu'il puisse y avoir de condition

---

[15] Rebecca Comay, 'Hegel's Last Words', dans Rebecca Comay et Frank Ruda, *The Dash* [*Le tiret / La course*] – *The Other Side of Absolute Knowing*, Cambridge/London, MIT Press, 2018. Numéro de page indisponible.

[16] Il est légèrement étonnant qu'Hegel croit que quelque chose d'étroitement analogue tient pour Spinoza. On peut défendre sa position : chez Spinoza, rationaliste *métaphysique*, le seul critère qui peut *disqualifier* l'existence actuelle d'une chose conceptuellement scrutée est la *contradiction*, le manque de cohérence logique du cercle carré étant dit la preuve de son impossibilité. Chez Spinoza également, les modes (le *comment* de l'actualité de l'actuel, le *comment* de l'être) sont *extérieurs* à ce qui est véritablement effectif : la *seule* substance, infiniment et indifféremment modifiable.

nécessaire *a priori* pour quoi que ce soit, et affirme plutôt que la pensée doit se fonder d'elle-même de manière corrigible.[17]

Chez Hegel et Sellars, c'est l'*acte* du savoir ou l'*acte* du dire lui-même qui est actuel et effectif de la manière la plus urgente, en conséquence la question du statut du *devoir-être* qui permet à cet acte de se lier à une règle « afin de » se distinguer du « processus primaire » *totalement* acéphale (pour reprendre un lexique freudien) devient urgent aussi. Nous proposons une réponse à l'aspect [aii.] de notre premier problème en suggérant un alignement stratégique de Sellars et Nietzsche. Notamment, nous nous intéressons à l'idée de Nietzsche qu'« [é]lever et discipliner un animal qui puisse *faire des promesses* »[18] implique que l'homéostasie instinctuelle soit *violemment* rompue et retournée contre elle-même à travers un régime d'entraînement auto-refoulant et refoulant-de-l'autre qui mérite même – et ici nous employons un vocabulaire très imagé et unilatéral, ce qu'il va falloir nuancer par la suite – d'être appelé « sanglante ». Se lier à une règle, c'est une forme d'*étrangement*. « Et ne faudrait-il pas ajouter que ce monde n'a jamais perdu tout à fait une certaine odeur de sang et de torture ? (pas même chez le vieux Kant : l'impératif catégorique a un relent de cruauté…) »[19]

Sellars quant à lui déploie la théorie scientifique des systèmes complexes et l'évolution darwinienne dans le cadre du modèle wittgensteinien des « jeux de langage » afin de proposer que ce qu'il appelle le « comportement régi par des règles » est, en quelque sorte, une involution, avec propriétés émergentes nouvelles, du « comportement régi par des *patterns* »[20]. Le comportement régi par des *patterns* caractériserait n'importe quel organisme biologique. Cela étant dit, nous insistons sur le fait que Sellars ne vise aucunement une réduction éliminatrice biologisante de l'autonomie de la pensée. Bien au contraire, la distinction des deux types de comportement – dessiné dans l'horizon de leur synthèse disjonctive dans une unité-en-différence dialectique – vise à remettre en cause

[17] Il y a donc certes une analogie, plus ou moins étroite, à dessiner entre ce que Hegel propose dans la philosophie et ce que Kurt Gödel propose un siècle plus tard à travers ses théorèmes d'incomplétude dans la métamathématique.

[18] Friedrich Nietzsche, *La généalogie de la morale*, tr. Henri Albert, Paris, Mercure de France, 1900 [1887], p. 85.

[19] *Ibid.* p. 101.

[20] W. Sellars, 'Some Reflections on Language Games', dans W. Sellars, *Science, Perception, and Reality*, Atascadero, Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1991 [1963], p. 323-358, p. 326-329.

l'exclusion oppositive, trop aigüe, entre la liaison-à-une-règle volontaire, consciente-de-soi, et la *pulsion causale* inconsciente.[21]

Contre une telle polarisation, peu dialectique, Sellars affirme que la danse « frétillante » exécutée par l'abeille qui retourne à la ruche ayant découvert une source de nectar ou de pollen, et qui en dansant communique à ses confrères la localisation de cette source, *peut* se concevoir en « jeu de langage » réglé, normé, *sans* attribuer aux abeilles l'intentionnalité ou la conscience-de-soi. Leur « jeu » est entrepris de façon aussi irréfléchie qu'un « schéma de câblage électrique ».[22] Le comportement complexe biologique chez Sellars peut se dire à la fois causalement compulsif, *et* normé de « règles » instituées par le biais de la dérive évolutionnaire errante, privée de la moindre téléologie. Pour que l'intentionnalité et la conscience-de-soi jaillissent – ainsi que la capacité de *décider*, et d'essayer de forger des *nouvelles* règles – il faut qu'il y ait un « méta-jeu » qui permet qu'un jeu de premier ordre soit conceptuellement saisi comme tel. En résumé, l'on pourrait de cette manière générale thématiser le déphasage entre passivement *pattern*-régi (il ne s'agit, selon nous, de rien d'autre que ce qui est nommé par Hegel « l'*impuissance* de la nature », *die Ohnmacht der Natur*[23]) et – non moins compulsif – ce qui est régi par une règle, et activement forme des règles : le pouvoir

[21] En effet, il est d'une importance capitale de souligner que l'utilisation par Sellars de certaines idées tirées des sciences naturelles afin de rendre compte de l'intentionnalité est dialectiquement justifiée. Comme argumente Dionysias Christias, il s'agit du postulat que le conditionnement social de la conceptualité ne peut pas s'expliquer lui-même en se référant au conditionnement social (cf. Dionysias Christias, 'The Non-Conceptual Dimension of Social Mediation: Toward a Materialist *Aufhebung* of Hegel', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 23:3, 2019, p. 448-473.). Alors, si la dialectique est un mouvement de négativité, l'hégélien peut toujours insister que cette négativité soit forcément présupposée par toute quête d'explication, et ne peut donc pas se voir réduit à une quelconque positivité.

Qui plus est, nous suggérons dans notre troisième Chapitre que Sellars partage profondément l'idée de la non-séparation de la compulsion et la spontanéité (concept à préciser par la suite) avec *Lacan*, qui se demande, de manière imagée, « Est-ce que, si un oiseau peignait, ce ne serait pas en laissant choir ses plumes, un serpent ses écailles, un arbre à s'écheniller et à faire pleuvoir ses feuilles ? » (Jacques Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse [Séminaire livre XI, 1964]*, Seuil, 1973, p. 129.) Cela étant dit, il faut en même temps clarifier expressément que notre argument se veut *anti*-panpsychiste.

[22] W. Sellars, 'Some Reflections on Language Games', p. 328.

[23] G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophie de la nature*, tr. Bernard Bourgeois, Paris, Vrin, 2004 [1830], 190.

rationnel que Kant nomme la *spontanéité.* Cela étant dit, il faut souligner qu'un tel « modèle réduit » (*toy-model,* si nous pouvons emprunter ce terme, pour un modèle délibérément simplificateur, de la physique) n'est pas utilisé afin de s'assurer qu'il y ait de la transparence entre jeu et méta-jeu ; au contraire, il n'en est rien. À l'encontre des héritiers libéraux-conciliateurs de l'enseignement de Sellars – et Sellars lui-même était de toute évidence *marxiste* – il ne peut y avoir de transparence mais bien au contraire, dans la première instance, une opacité totale, puisque les méta-jeux sont sous-déterminés dans leur capacité à forger de nouvelles règles par n'importe quel donné. La critique sellarsienne du « Mythe du Donné », qui sera esquissée ci-dessous, n'implique rien de moins.[24]

Mettre en fonction ensemble Sellars et Nietzsche permet d'exprimer l'advenue de la rationalité non comme l'évaporation de la compulsion mais plutôt comme un déphasage dans la compulsion elle-même. Toutefois, une telle tentative ne peut pas être entreprise dans un esprit de démantèlement gratuit – bien au contraire ! Le but est de tenter de poursuivre la mission de Hegel, contre Kant, celle de doter le *devoir-être* de sa propre actualité, afin de le sortir du piège du mauvais infini, tel que l'on va pouvoir dire qu'il se soude à des actes matériaux. Des desseins porteurs de contenus concrets *peuvent* alors (tout au moins, lorsque l'on parle abstraitement, lorsque l'on parle du principe) se satisfaire – pour ainsi dire – au cœur du noumène.

(b) *Le problème du Nouveau.*

Nous nous permettrons ici un ton légèrement polémique, dans le seul intérêt de présenter à l'examen de la lectrice ou du lecteur une expression vive des enjeux qui, nous en sommes convaincu, se décèlent au sein de ce problème.

Si l'on pose que la nouveauté ou le Nouveau se laisse caractériser *simplement* en ce qu'il « se différencie du » Vieux et du vieilli, ou si l'on pose que le Nouveau s'identifie *simplement* grâce au fait qu'il « rompt avec » ou « transgresse » le déjà-établi, l'étiolé et l'éculé – dans l'art, mais pas uniquement – alors, le problème sera que l'on ne parviendra qu'à faire une *négation indéterminée* de l'Ancien, des déterminités finies ennuyeuses déjà existantes. Il resterait à discuter *comment produire* une nouveauté. En parallèle, si le

[24] Le donné catégoriel-cognitif n'est jamais lui-même donné, même dans sa forme *minimalement* consciemment réfléchie, que par le biais des méta-jeux qui sont eux-mêmes institués de manière, disons, « sordide », « impérieusement impératif », et qui ne sont pas *déduits* de façon métaphysiquement claire-et-distincte.

« progrès », ou l'acte qui dépasse le fini, est censé équivaloir à un rehaussement quantitativement mesurable sur une échelle ou un barème dont les montants croissants de ce paramètre se voient maladroitement, abruptement étiquetés *simplement* comme « mieux » ou « plus utile » ou « plus jouissif », alors le sceptique se débrouillera facilement pour balayer l'idée que l'on puisse s'attacher raisonnablement à établir un impératif (rationnel ou politique) du dépassement du donné qui se voudrait *absolu*, c'est-à-dire, non-relativisable, ou, en langage kantien, non-pathologique. L'affirmation d'un tel impératif (appelons-le l'impératif de cet impératif) sera aisément écartée, rapidement diagnostiquée comme étant une rêverie telle celle de Pangloss, ou de l'historiographie complaisamment « Whig » (Victorienne-téléologique-eschatologique), ou comme n'étant rien de plus qu'un vœu pieux, ou – point dont la portée est peut-être la plus lourdement instructive, même s'il s'agit d'un fruit inédit, ou au moins imprévu, de l'analyse – comme un utilitarisme grossier qui se caricaturerait en cybernétique du titillement gratuit, cybernétique qui s'avouera à la suite d'un modèle illégitimement transcendantalisé d'*optimisation quantitative* néolibérale, c'est-à-dire *hayekien-friedmannien*.

Dans tous les cas, opposer le Nouveau au Vieux de cette manière vouée à l'indifférence, à l'indéterminé dans sa vacuité, et vouloir ensuite en tirer une quelconque propriété qui serait censée discerner la réussite du dépassement, se révélera (Marx et Adorno nous ont convaincus) surdéterminé – pour ainsi dire, en marionnette de ventriloque – par le leurre trompeur d'un *pur immédiat* qui s'est installé au niveau du phantasme inconscient. Ce leurre, aux yeux de Marx et d'Adorno (lus avec un regard lacanien), résulte du régime global actuel de la pratique sociale, lequel régime est structuré par l'extraction de ce que Marx appelle la « plus-value » : il résulte du capitalisme. Dans le cas où la lectrice ou le lecteur se laisse persuader par ce raisonnement, alors, ériger en critère de réussite l'« indétermination » *simple* – ou bien la « croissance » ou l'« augmentation » *brute* – commencera à apparaître au grand jour comme un geste *continuateur* du règne de la forme-valeur abstraite et homogène, et du « mauvais infini » de ce règne.

Nous proposons que cette impasse nécessite que l'on se mette d'accord avec Hegel à reconnaître que ce qu'il nomme le « bon infini » – s'agissant d'un dépassement du donné à travers la détermination d'une nouveauté, là où ce dépassement ne se perd pas dans une quête interminable en manque de complétude et en échec perpétuel à s'auto-consolider– ne peut pas se concevoir en termes quantitatifs, mais seulement en termes de *différence qualitative*, à l'instar de la définition de la *forme logique* de la différence

qualitative livrée par Hegel proche de l'ouverture de sa *Science de la logique* (1812, révisée 1832)[25]. Cette définition exprime la différence qualitative par le biais d'une structuration se déclinant à travers la référence constitutive d'une propriété qualitative à son opposé : chaud ou froid, sucré ou salé, tellurique ou gazeux. Il s'agit d'une « unité-dans-la-contradiction » qui aux yeux d'Hegel s'établit en illustration – et, en quelque sorte, en cas-limite – de la *négation déterminée* en tant que telle. La réponse au problème du Nouveau que nous sondons se rabat sur la déclaration – en fin de compte assez élémentaire, sans ténuité excessive – que le Nouveau qui réussit à effectuer un bon infini doit être *qualitativement nouveau*. La figure appropriée au dépassement est alors celle d'une *torsion* qui « casse » – qui *nie* – le donné, et cela se comprend d'autant mieux lorsque nous parvenons ci-dessus à proposer la thèse interprétative qui y est secondaire, notamment, que l'aspect de la négation déterminée à laquelle nous avons ici affaire est sa capacité de *produire* de *nouvelles irréversibilités qualitatives logiques*. Sans suppositions théologiques, le présupposé que la nouveauté quelconque jaillisse *ex nihilo* n'est pas soutenable. Par conséquent, il faut renoncer au principe logique du tiers exclu afin de pouvoir conclure que seule la *négation féconde* des clichés, shibboleths, et erreurs actuelles puisse, pour ainsi dire, faire « sortir du four » un inédit fraîchement boulangé : qu'elle seule puisse construire et découvrir (dans cette optique les deux termes s'équivalent) de *nouvelles contradictions*.

Dans la conjoncture contemporaine la question du Nouveau se pose à la lumière de certaines pistes de recherche qui, selon nous – même si elles lient, avec raison, l'idée du bien à l'idée de l'innovation – ont tendance – dès lors qu'il s'agit de conceptualiser le bien *tel qu'opposé au mauvais*, le bien que l'on souhaite épargner et garder une fois franchi le seuil qui mène, en langage Nietzschéen, « au-delà du bien et du *mal* », au-delà du *mal* contrastif *moralisant-religieux*, et fut-ce un bien non-religieux qui, comme chez Deleuze et Guattari, se dit de façon inhabituelle comme « déterritorialisation » – à

[25] Se diriger vers cet ouvrage d'Hegel dans le but d'éclaircir des questions qui peuvent se dire, en effet, pleinement *logiques* équivaut à refuser que le terme « logique » soit réduit au sens étriqué de « logique mathématisée », une réduction plutôt répandue aujourd'hui, surtout dans la sphère anglophone. Sans s'y attarder, on constate que le travail ici résumé favorise une définition hégélienne de la logique philosophique comme « la science des choses telles que saisies par la pensée ». Si Hegel est un penseur de la rationalité, cela n'empêche pas forcément que puisse s'y additionner la caractérisation livrée par Jean-Yves Girard : « La logique est une médiation entre rationnel et irrationnel. » (J.-Y. Girard, *La Fantôme de la transparence*, Paris, Allia, 2016, p. 15.)

s'appuyer sur des critères de réussite *quantitatifs*. Ainsi des filières de pensée néo-spinoziste recommandent d'« *augmenter* la connectivité » ou d'« *augmenter* l'intensité ». Cependant, si la propriété qui discerne le *plus* ainsi ciblé ne se résume pas tout simplement à ce qui *fait du bien*, au *plaisir* (et Adorno remet en cause la puissance différenciatrice, et donc la pertinence, d'un tel indice), alors la question se pose à savoir *qui* fixe le paramètre identificateur du *plus*, et comment, pourquoi, et dans quel but ? Il y a plusieurs espèces distinctes de connectivité et d'intensité, et cela ne va nullement de soi que *moins* de certaines espèces de ces variables ne puisse pas dans certaines circonstances se prêter à la liberté et au dépassement.

L'étude ici résumée ambitionne de puiser des ressources dignes de cette conjoncture et de cette problématique chez Hegel. Dans la mesure où nous nous rallions à Hegel, contre Kant, concernant l'*effectivité de l'acte subjectif*, nous trouvons un allié dans l'œuvre de F. W. J. Schelling. Schelling est en solidarité avec Hegel en ce qui concerne l'affirmation de l'Identité spéculative du sujet et de l'objet : leur entrelacement et coappartenance, au moins de-la-dernière-instance. Mais pour éviter l'anthropomorphisme et « la nuit où toutes les vaches sont noires »[26], il faut s'emparer d'une stratégie ou d'une autre afin de distinguer la subjectivité et l'objectivité. Or, on peut lire une déclaration faite par Schelling – philosophe qui élabore une métaphysique naturalisante des forces se heurtant les unes aux autres – que la différence entre sujet et objet doit se concevoir de façon *quantitative* :

> *Entre le sujet et l'objet il n'y a pas d'autre différence possible que quantitative. En effet* [...] *aucune différence qualitative entre les deux n'est pensable.* [...] [P]uisque aucune différentiation entre les deux n'est possible sous le rapport de l'être même (car elle *est* en tant que sujet et objet de façon également inconditionnée et donc la même aussi selon l'essence,) il ne reste qu'une différence quantitative, c'est-à-dire une différence telle qu'elle ne trouve place que sous le rapport de la *grandeur* de l'être, c'est-à-dire de telle façon qu'à la vérité c'est un Seul également identique qui est posé,

[26] Par rapport à ce reproche élevé contre le schellingianisme par Hegel dans la Préface de sa *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*, voir la réitération quasiment exhaustive de notre Chapitre 6, ci-dessous.

> mais avec une prédominance de la subjectivité [du connaître] ou de l'objectivité [de l'être].[27]

Une certaine distribution dans la pression ou dynamique *quantitativement individuée* entre forces objectives suffit à discerner ce qui fait que la subjectivité puisse se dire subjectivité. Y a-t-il des méandres des filières néo-spinozistes contemporaines qui s'accorderaient à cette déclaration néo-spinoziste de Schelling ? On pourrait songer à la lecture originale de la métaphysique nietzschéenne faite par Deleuze en 1962[28], ou également aux « ontologies plates » d'aujourd'hui, telles que celles élaborées par Graham

---

[27] F. W. J. Schelling, *Exposition de mon système de la philosophie. Sur le vrai concept de la philosophie de la nature*, tr. Emmanuel Cattin, Paris, Vrin, 2000 [1801] ; il semble que les interpositions sont celles du traducteur. Passage partiellement cité dans *WW*.

[28] Deux décennies plus tard, nous lisons dans les *Milles Plateaux* de Deleuze et Guattari non seulement que 'le réel écrit matériellement', ce avec quoi il faut se mettre d'accord (à quelques avertissements près), mais aussi que les auteurs visent le but de '*quantifier l'écriture*' (souligné dans l'original). Voici les deux passages dont il s'agit (Deleuze et Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, Paris, Minuit, 1980, p. 176-177, p. 10. Partiellement cités dans *WW*) :

> Un contenu-matière qui ne présente plus que des degrés d'intensité, de résistance, de conductibilité, d'échauffement, d'étirement, de vitesse ou de tardivité ; une expression-fonction qui ne présente plus que des « tenseurs », comme dans une écriture mathématique, ou bien musicale. Alors l'écriture fonctionne à même le réel, tout comme le réel écrit matériellement.

> Quel est le corps sans organes d'un livre ? Il y en a plusieurs, d'après la nature des lignes considérées, d'après leur teneur ou leur densité propre, d'après leur possibilité de convergence sur un « plan de consistance » qui en assure la sélection. Là comme ailleurs, l'essentiel, ce sont les unités de mesure : *quantifier l'écriture*. Il n'y a pas de différence entre ce dont un livre parle et la manière dont il est fait. Un livre n'a donc pas davantage d'objet.

Scruter une telle déclaration avec un œil critique n'empêche pas de s'inspirer de l'idée deleuzo-guattarienne de la « déterritorialisation », ni d'être à l'écoute de l'appel ardemment émis par ses auteurs envers une *réhabilitation matérialiste de l'Absolu*. Le dédale philosophique qui s'apparente à cette dernière pousse l'étude ici résumée à répondre que le « matérialisme » ne saurait *exclure ou proscrire* l'« idéalisme ».

Harman ou Bruno Latour. En tout état de cause, il s'agit là d'un point sur lequel Hegel et Schelling divergent de façon drastique, comme le montre le passage suivant, long mais lexico-philosophiquement riche, tiré de la *Logique* de Hegel :

> Parce que le quantitatif est la déterminité posée comme supprimé, ont cru avoir beaucoup ou, bien plutôt, tout gagné pour l'unité de l'absolu, pour la substantialité une, en rabaissant l'opposition en générale à une différence seulement quantitative. *Toute opposition est seulement quantitative* : ce fut là, un certain temps, une proposition principale d'une philosophie récente [...] en l'un des côtés, l'un des facteurs, et, en l'autre côté, l'autre facteur, est *prédominant*, et le moment prédominant fut fréquemment aussi pris dans le sens que voici, à savoir que dans l'un des côtés, l'un des facteurs : une matière ou une activité, serait présente selon une *plus grande quantité* ou un *degré plus fort* que dans l'autre côté. [...] – Ou [encore,] en tant que l'être et la pensée sont représentés comme des déterminations quantitatives de la substance absolue, ils deviennent, comme quanta, précisément par là – ainsi que c'est le cas, dans une sphère subordonnée, pour le carbone, l'azote, etc. – parfaitement extérieurs et sans relations entre eux. C'est un tiers, une réflexion extérieure, qui fait abstraction de leur différence et connait leur unité *intérieure* [c'est-à-dire *ici* : mutuellement isolée, atomique, non-relationnelle - D.B.], qui *est* seulement *en soi*, non pas aussi bien *pour soi*. Cette unité est, de cette manière, représentée seulement comme *être*, un être qui, dans sa différence quantitative, *demeure* égal à soi, mais ne *se pose* pas égal à soi par soi-même ; ou [encore,] il n'est conçu en tant que négation de la négation, en tant qu'unité infinie. C'est seulement l'opposition qualitative qui contient la véritable infinité, et la différence quantitative passe, comme cela va dans un instant se dégager de façon plus précise, dans ce qui est qualitatif.[29]

[29] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 357-358. Partiellement cité dans *WW*.

Nous expliquerons davantage et dans les détails lors de l'exposé des concepts hégéliens fondamentaux qui se fera ci-dessous à travers la réitération quasi-exhaustive de notre sixième Chapitre à quel point il est conséquent de constater que Hegel insiste sur le fait que la différence entre *sujet* (la pensée, et la pratique potentiellement autotélique) et *substance* (dans un sens postkantien du mot qui revient à vouloir dire : *l'objectivité*) ne saurait qu'être une différence *qualitative*. Mettre le doigt empiriquement sur les propriétés de l'un ou l'autre est impossible – et la phrénologie a été une tentative particulièrement déprimante de faire ceci pour l'esprit – car, où s'inscrirait et se réfléchirait la scission entre la nature (la non-penée) et la pensée, sinon que *dans la pensée* ? D'autant plus, la différence doit être une différence « *forte* » par laquelle quelque chose de *nouveau* se met en marche. Selon Hegel, ce dernier est *la négativité se-rapportant-à-soi*.

> La non-identité qui se produit dans la conscience entre le Je et la substance qui est son objet, est sa différence, le *négatif* tout simplement. On peut regarder celui-ci comme le *manque* de l'un et l'autre, mais il est leur âme, leur principe moteur ; ce pourquoi certains Anciens concevaient le *vide* comme le principe moteur, dans la mesure où ils appréhendaient certes le principe moteur comme le *négatif*, mais n'appréhendaient pas encore celui-ci comme le Soi-même de la substance. Ce qui semble se passer en dehors d'elle, être une activité dirigée contre elle, est son propre agissement et elle se montre comme étant essentiellement sujet.[30]

La négativité au sens hégélien n'a rien à voir avec les sentiments mélancoliques. Elle est plutôt le pouvoir de connaître qui différencie les différences. « Dur » *n*'est *pas* « mou ». Et en tant que pouvoir constructif de connaître, la négativité-se-rapportant-à-soi est *en principe* capable de *créer* de nouvelles différentiations. Contrairement à la causalité naturelle, elle se dote de ce que Kant avait appelé la *spontanéité*, c'est-à-dire de la « liberté *à* s'auto-légiférer »[31]. Dans la transformation qui nous amène néanmoins de Kant

[30] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*, tr. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, Paris, Flammarion, 2012 [1807], p. 82-83.

[31] Howard Caygill, entrée sur la 'Spontanéité' dans Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, p. 374-376, p. 375. Dans la spontanéité kantienne la créativité s'entrelace avec

à Hegel, cette dernière devient la liberté (de principe) *à* construire et *à* découvrir des nécessités logiques.[32] Lorsque le mouvement de la négativité réussit son coup, sa réussite n'implique pas qu'elle chasse ou corrode tout simplement ce qui lui a été passivement présenté (une première négation, indéterminée), mais plutôt qu'elle nie cette négation même en produisant une nouvelle détermination qui dépasse et « relève » (*hebt auf*) ce donné (la négation de la négation : la négation déterminée). L'hégélien ainsi dira, par exemple, que le principe d'inertie dans la physique de Descartes et de Newton n'est pas *simplement* la chasse ou la corrosion de son rival aristotélicien. Le tire-bouchon électromagnétique de Maxwell s'entremêle dans des rapports de négation déterminée avec l'éther luminifère qui ne sont pas sans lien avec la production, plus tard, de la théorie de la relativité générale. Le capitalisme n'est pas *seulement* la corrosion ou la chasse du féodalisme, et l'idée du communisme n'est pas *simplement* l'idée de la chasse ou la corrosion du capitalisme.

Cela étant dit, les interventions de Marx et de Lacan – et aussi de Sellars – montrent que, pour tout idéalisme matérialiste ou matérialisme idéaliste qui voudrait s'emparer des armes *critiques* bâties par Hegel, son « *cercle de cercles* »[33] de la relève et du bon infini ne peut qu'être un cercle opaque-à-soi, cassé. La pratique est opaque à la

---

la seule capacité d'être conscient d'une chose *comme* une chose. Concernant cette valence minimale du terme, Kant écrit, de manière très générale, que

> la connaissance de tout entendement, de moins de l'entendement humain, est une connaissance par concepts, non intuitive, mais discursive. Toutes les intuitions en tant que sensibles reposent sur des affections, les concepts, par conséquent, sur des fonctions. Or j'entends par fonction l'unité de l'action consistant à ordonner des représentations diverses sous une représentation commune. *Les concepts se fondent donc sur la spontanéité de la pensée* (Immanuel Kant, *Critique de la raison pure*, tr. Alain Renaut, Flammarion, 2006, [1781/1783], p. 155, A68 / B93. Nous soulignons.)

Danielle Macbeth précise que chez Kant le *jugement* se conçoit comme « un acte de spontanéité, de liberté expressive, qui est, lorsque réussi, un exercice de la raison en tant que pouvoir de connaître. » (D. Macbeth, *Realizing Reason: A Narrative of Truth and Knowing*, Oxford, OUP, 2014, p. 452.)

[32] Sans vouloir laisser entendre qu'Hegel aura *complètement* abandonné le paradigme législatif.

[33] G. W. F. Hegel, *Science de la logique. Troisième livre – le concept*, tr. Bernard Bourgeois, Paris, Vrin, 2016 [1816], p. 320.

théorie. Faute des grands efforts, et sans garantie, elle n'apparaît en elle que de manière déformée. La *Vérité* peut donc, au fil de ces raisonnements, se concevoir comme étant, en tant que telle, toujours la vérité du caractère propre à la raison elle-même, celle d'être sans but métaphysiquement préétabli ou figé : la vérité, éventuellement, de l'*inutilité*. Si le donné épistémique, *qua* occasion pour extériorisation (ou pour « dessaisissement » : c'est-à-dire, pour « aliénation » au sens constructif[34]), est sous-déterminé dans sa forme immédiate par tout autre donné, alors la connaissance se révèle *constitutivement* scindée par un déficit de fausseté. D'où l'idée que la vérité puisse se dire du « *faux faussé* », et que l'effectuation du vrai pourrait se doter du slogan de « *l'acte de faire du tort au tort* », ou de l'impératif « *tordre le tort* ».

D. Abrégé des Sections I et II, Chapitres 1-4. Problématisation

Di. Sommaire de la Section I

La thèse débute par des considérations kantiennes, introduisant la terminologie du « transcendantal », ainsi que celle de l'« universel » et du « particulier » propre à la manière d'Hegel d'exprimer cette distinction à l'encontre de Kant, mais non sans certains points d'accord. Cela faisant, la Section I fait d'une pierre deux coups, et passe également en revue un concurrent contemporain à la résolution du problème du *devoir-être* : ce qui est appelé dans cette Section l'« hyperkantisme ». Le représentant de l'hyperkantisme examiné est François Laruelle, qui élabore une « philosophie non-standard ». (Nous entrevoyons cependant dans la Section II de *WW* que John McTaggart, grâce à un article de 1908 sur « L'irréalité du temps », correspond également à la classification d'« hyperkantien ».)

L'hyperkantisme de Laruelle fait office de faire-valoir auprès de notre propre défense de (certains aspects de) Hegel (un Hegel qui n'échappe pourtant pas à répondre à des soucis matérialistes lesquels, en quelque sorte, renvoient à Kant), en ce que Laruelle *suspend* entièrement la question du *devoir-être*, et veut – pour utiliser une métaphore nette – trancher d'un coup sec la tête du *devoir-être*, un peu comme celle du général d'armée qui, selon une légende qui circule parmi les historiens militaires, a été décapité par un tir perdu de canon. Laruelle s'empare du caractère *conditionné* chez Kant de toute déterminité – spatio-temporelle, ou qualitativement différenciée et individuée autrement

[34] Nous avons en tête une fois de plus l'*Entäusserung* d'Hegel jusqu'à Marx.

– afin d'exprimer la toile d'araignée *relationnelle* et *idéale* qui discerne et distingue les déterminités comme étant elle-même constituée préalablement par l'assomption d'un *principe de différence a priori* qui, sous la plume de Laruelle, se voit lui-même déterminé, effectué, et mis en marche seulement grâce à sa distinction *réelle* de l'*indifférence réelle*. Il s'agit d'un « *a priori de l'a priori* » qui fait écho à certains égards à des attitudes du néoplatonisme. Cependant, si l'autorité tyrannique est retirée à la tête, autrefois bien trop philosophique dans la façon qu'elle avait d'imposer des relations à ses subalternes, son *effectivité* n'en est pas ôtée. Le but est plutôt que le concret et l'abstrait s'effondrent l'un dans l'autre dans l'indifférence, de sorte à repousser la médiation étouffante du *devoir-être*[35] jusque dans l'expression de la « splendeur » du déterminé et la libération d'une productivité expansive qui est à la fois conceptuelle et anti-idéaliste. Il s'agit d'un effet performatif que l'on pourrait comparer avec une forme d'art conceptuel.

Nous concluons que ce qui est bienvenu dans l'hyperkantisme est la tentative sans pitié de démanteler la substance métaphysique classique. Laruelle réussit à réfuter que la pensée puisse atteindre une perspective de survol lui permettant de surveiller de haut son propre rapport à ce-qui-n'est-pas-la-pensée et son propre champ de possibilité, survol qui voudrait la rendre prévisible et transparente-à-soi. Cela dit, nous rejetons l'*absolutisation de la finitude* que nous décelons dans les ingrédients que Laruelle puise chez Heidegger. Selon nous, la substance classique se faufile subrepticement dès lors que Laruelle *sépare* le fini de toute auto-relève possible et lorsqu'il absolutise ce que nous appelons l'*hypercomplétude*. Laruelle sépare le sans-rapport du relationnel, mais la *négativité* hégélienne remet en cause l'absoluité de ce genre d'exclusion, et donc nous argumentons que l'on peut douter que le sans-rapport prend le dessus sur le relationnel. Notre étude

---

[35] Dans un contexte postkantien on peut dire qu'un concept (pour Kant et Hegel, chose relationnelle) *est* une *règle*. Béatrice Longuenesse explique pourquoi : la conceptualisation est un *faire*, et un concept est un *comment* pour un agir conceptuel (cf. B. Longuenesse, *Kant et le pouvoir de juger*, Paris, PUF, 1993, p. 44-48.) Sellars (sinon Marx) met l'emphase sur l'enracinement conditionnant de cet acte sur le plan de la socialité, ce qui fait que le *comment* est *prescriptif* (plutôt que métaphysiquement clair-et-distinct en don de Dieu comme chez Descartes. Un exemple heuristique très décalé : « Vous croyez qu'il *devrait être* le cas que les chiens apportent le journal à leur être humain ? Alors, entraînez votre chien pour que ce cas *devienne vrai*. »). Une règle conceptuelle stipule ce que je *devrais* faire pour obtenir une conceptualisation (efficace ou inefficace), mais que je *pourrais* faire autrement pour éventuellement en obtenir une autre (efficace ou inefficace). Alors, on peut dire qu'une règle *est un devoir-être*.

prend plutôt le parti du matérialisme historique de Marx et Engels, l'emphase étant mise sur ce que cette doctrine retient d'Hegel, même si elle s'avère à bien des égards sévèrement critique. Selon Marx, même de tels blocages pouvant être subis par l'autodépassement de la pensée ne sont rien d'autres que des *étrangements* auto-entravant *de la pratique humaine lui-même*, étrangements à travers ses normes et ses rapports sociaux conditionnants.

Néanmoins, Laruelle a raison de protéger la réalité de *ce qui est privé de sens* de toute récupération philosophique sournoise ou simpliste. La Section I tente donc en parallèle de poser la question de la dialectique entre la signification et le non-signifiant, donnant à ce dernier – qu'il s'agisse des souillures, des bruits, ou des contradictions incohérentes – le nom de « taches ».[36] Laruelle désubstantialise les taches, mais il ne les dialectise pas ; d'où le point de départ de la Section suivante.

Dii. Sommaire de la Section II

La Section II est composée d'une analyse et réflexion étendue qui a pour point de départ un article de 1938 de Theodor W. Adorno, « Le Caractère fétiche dans la musique et la régression de l'écoute ». Dans cet article, la sublimation Freudienne musicale est saisie comme une modalité de *construction libre*, s'emparant de la matière occasionnelle du son. En un mot, si la pulsion Freudienne est à soulager *par le biais de sa mise en marche*, *sa mise à l'œuvre* à l'instar d'Orphée, plutôt qu'étouffée ou extirpée à travers un passage à l'acte Bacchante, alors cela implique nécessairement une plasticité de la matière occasionnelle ainsi qu'un degré de commande et contrôle de cette plasticité : la *synthèse* kantienne.

En ce qui concerne cet article d'Adorno, un article philosophiquement précoce, nous avons affaire en effet à un *transcendantalisme* rigoureux, manifeste notamment à travers le respect montré non seulement pour ce que Kant appelle la « spontanéité » du jugement et de la raison (leur liberté *inconditionnée* – bien que, dans la première instance, évidée –, leur caractère *actif*, et la définition non-réifiée, et donc fonctionnelle, du « je »), mais aussi pour la disjonction de la moindre miette phénoménale de l'en-soi

[36] Une version plus courte de la Section I est parue dans la revue *Labyrinth* : cf. David Bremner, « Non-Standard Stainless: Laruelle, Inconsistency and Sense-impressions », *Labyrinth. An International Journal for Philosophy, Value Theory and Sociocultural Hermeneutics* Vol 20, No 1 (2018): Metaphysics, Religion, and Heresy, p. 89-107. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.25180/lj.v20i1.120.

dogmatiquement transparent de la métaphysique classique. L'approche est, en même temps, hégélienne (et je constate sur le sujet qu'il n'y a pas de contradiction *prima facie*), car, notamment, Adorno place la source du *désir* dans le fait même de la médiatisation, décèle le conditionnement de la médiatisation ici pertinente au niveau de la *socialité*, et soutien que la musique elle-même pose des « méta- »questions portant sur cette même médiatisation qui est en train de se jouer à travers elle, telle qu'elle ne peut pas ne pas dire des choses concernant la forme de la société actuelle. « [L]es instants diffus d'une musique savoureuse »[37] – c'est-à-dire, les *plaisirs* musicaux fugitifs – sont des donnés occurrents à retravailler et à synthétiser dans un méta-tout cognitif dont la *vérité* pourrait n'offrir que très peu de plaisir simple, surtout (mais pas seulement) lorsque l'on se focalise sur l'ère de l'exploitation capitaliste et de la forme-valeur, forme qui s'élève à une dominance socialement restructurante peu de temps après l'époque d'Haydn et de Mozart. La « forme-valeur », c'est l'« abstraction réelle », à l'œuvre à travers la pratique sociale – dans la première instance inconsciemment – qui chez Marx calibre (ou mesure, ou constitue) le « temps de travail socialement nécessaire » avec la valeur d'échange homogénéisée (chiffrable par de la monnaie), par le biais du « travail abstrait ». Elle permet ainsi l'extraction de la plus-value, et en même temps engendre certaines fantasmagories au niveau du phantasme inconscient. Récapitulons les trois étapes clés de notre Chapitre 3, que nous marquerons (a.), (b.), et (c.).

(a.) Symptomatologie. Les choses vont mal

En 1938 Adorno observe, ou propose, ou argumente, que dans la société capitaliste la façon qu'ont les gens à se rapporter à la musique ne va pas.

> On pourrait [...] légitimement demander qui la musique de variétés divertit-elle encore [*wen die Unterhaltungsmusik noch unterhalte*]. Elle semble plutôt venir parachever le projet de réduire les hommes au silence, de flétrir la dimension expressive de leur langage et, plus globalement, de les rendre incapable de communiquer : elle habite les poches de silence qui se forme entre

[37] Theodor W. Adorno, « Le Caractère fétiche dans la musique et la régression de l'écoute » [CFM], tr. Christophe David, Paris, Editions Allia, 2001 [1938], p. 14.

> des hommes façonnés par l'angoisse, l'exploitation et une soumission absolue.[38]

Dans la symptomatologie dessinée par Adorno, ce qui va mal musicalement est étroitement lié à ce qui se révèle plus aisément et plus nettement aller mal concernant *la marchandise*.

> L'apparition de la valeur d'échange dans les marchandises a très précisément assuré la fonction d'un ciment. La femme qui dispose d'assez d'argent pour faire les magasins se grise de l'acte même d'acheter. « *Having a good time* » signifie par convention dans la langue américaine : participer au divertissement des autres qui de leur côté cherchent aussi à participer au mien. Il suffit des mots : « C'est une Rolls Royce », prononcés au moment du saint sacrement de la messe automobile pour que tous les hommes deviennent frères.[39]

D'une certaine manière liée à ce fétichisme de la marchandise, il semble, pour ainsi dire, qu'une sorte de poignard a coupé court à l'activité de la faculté de synthèse musicale des auditeurs, ou – dans l'image d'Adorno – qu'elle a été *bloqué*, comme par un écran.

> C'est bien dans ce type de relation que s'inscrit le consommateur lorsqu'il s'agit d'airs à succès. Ne lui est encore proche que ce qui lui est parfaitement étranger ; ne lui est étranger, comme séparé par un voile épais de la conscience des masses [*wie durch einen dichten Schleier vom Bewusstsein der Massen geschieden*], que ce qui cherche à parler au nom des muets.

[38] CFM, p. 9-10.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

> Lorsqu'il réagit, il n'est plus important de savoir si c'est à la *Septième Symphonie* ou bien à un bikini.[40]

Avant d'observer la diagnose par laquelle Adorno s'efforce d'expliquer *comment* les effets de Beethoven se sont vus réduits à ceux de la pornographie « soft », il faut que nous comprenions ce que la musique, à ses yeux, *devrait* pouvoir produire afin d'être estimée réussie.

(b.) La musique, que *devrait*-elle faire? Comment est-elle censée fonctionner ?

Dans l'article de 1938, Adorno offre trois buts pour la musique, dont nous attendrons de spécifier le troisième après avoir indiqué de quelle manière les deux premiers résonnent avec la critique du « Mythe du Donné » de Sellars. Le premier point est que la musique est sublimatoire : qu'elle devrait mettre la pulsion en marche *constructivement* dans une *organisation* du son :

> si la pulsion se manifeste immédiatement dans la musique, elle y trouve aussi une forme d'apaisement. Elle réveille la danse des ménades, elle sort de la flûte enchanteresse de Pan mais tout aussi bien de la lyre d'Orphée autour de laquelle se rassemblent, apaisées, les figures du désir [*um welche die Gestalten des Dranges gestillt sich versammeln*].[41]

Le deuxième point est que la musique réussie effectue des négations de certains obstacles idéologiques, socio-politiques, et que c'est précisément à travers ces négations qu'elle fait des découvertes formelles et qu'elle atteint un *progrès* qui peut se qualifier de

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 27. Les traducteurs anglais Arato et Gebhardt donnent pour la clause que nous avons interposée en allemand, « as if cut off from the consciousness of the masses by a dense screen ». *Schleier* peut signifier non seulement « voile » ou « écran », mais également « brouillard ». « Ce qui cherche à parler au nom des muets » est sans doute une référence à Schoenberg. À ce moment-là, bien qu'il changeât rapidement d'avis, Adorno admire la stratégie dodécaphoniste, qui consiste à ne plus faire de décisions synthétiques subjectives, afin de ne plus prétendre à une puissance dont le capital industriel aurait (supposément) en vérité privé le compositeur.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

plein fouet artistico-musical. Dans le passage qui suit, il s'agit de rejeter les immémoriales diatribes snobs réactionnaires qui, dans toutes les époques, incriminent l'actualité musicale d'avoir manifesté une décadence de goût. Le rejet de ce snobisme permet à Adorno de proposer que tout ce qui est profane et anti-snob dans la sonate – dans le *style galant* – ouvre la voie aux découvertes dans la dimension du timbre – c'est-à-dire, la « couleur » musicale ; les propriétés du son autre que le ton, le volume, et le rythme – dimension qui s'avère fondamentale pour les musiques bruitistes d'aujourd'hui.

> Tout ce qui est incriminé ici à trait au progrès : progrès social aussi bien qu'esthétique. Au-delà des séductions interdites, ce sont en fait la variété sensible et la conscience différenciante qui sont visées. La prépondérance, dans la musique, de la personne sur la puissance collective indique le moment de la liberté subjective, moment que la musique a traversé dans les phases ultérieures de son histoire. Cette dimension profane qui la soustrait à son oppression magique se présente comme quelque chose de purement superficiel [...] : la séduction sensuelle d'abord, porte par laquelle se sont engouffrées l'harmonie puis la couleur musicale [... ;] la « superficialité », en guise de critique de l'objectivité muette des formes, au sens où Haydn, par exemple, a choisi la musique « galante » de préférence à la musique savante.[42]

Nous argumentons que tout cela permet – ou *devrait permettre* – à Adorno d'éviter les embûches du « variant empirique » de ce que Sellars appelle le « Mythe du Donné non-catégoriel ». En effet, le « constructivisme dialectique » d'Adorno donne l'impression qu'il partage ardemment avec Sellars le méta-principe dont il s'agit, méta-principe qui est résumé par Sellars lorsqu'il déclare que

> rejeter le Mythe du Donné, c'est rejeter l'idée que la structure catégorielle du monde – si structure catégorielle il en possède –

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

> s'impose à l'esprit de la même manière qu'un sceau impose une image à de la cire fondue.[43]

Peu importe que les motivations de Sellars ne soient pas musicales, mais plutôt philosophiques et épistémiques. Sellars, quant à lui, s'intéresse en effet à repousser le dogmatisme philosophique qui se voudrait capable de donner droit à un point d'expérience purement non-médiatisée mais néanmoins porteuse de contenus épistémiquement autorisant et se voulant capable, de manière isolée, de fonder une connaissance. Sellars refuse donc l'idée qu'il pourrait y avoir une actualité – une chose ou état des choses – qui serait cognitivement auto-dévoilant, là où

> l'auto-présentation d'un état de choses [...] [serait] défini, au moins en partie, en termes de l'« évidence » ou caractère de « mandat garanti » de la croyance qu'il se tient en force.[44]

Il faut accepter, bien au contraire, que la médiatisation conceptuelle – laquelle aux yeux de Sellars passe par des batteries d'engagements inférentiels (de règles déductives) – est la condition de toute « donation-*à* » la conscience réflexive (à toute conscience-de-soi), ce qui implique une opacité entre déterminabilité expérientielle et en-soi métaphysique[45].

Nous pouvons voir qu'il y a – ou qu'il devrait y avoir – un accord important entre Adorno et Sellars. Car la troisième caractéristique qui identifie la musique éligible à réussir dans l'article d'Adorno est celle, négative, *privée de toute recette dictant comment*

---

[43] W. Sellars, 'Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process. The Carus Lectures of Wilfrid Sellars', *The Monist* 64 (1) 1981: 3-90 [FMPP], I. §45. Disponible en ligne : http://www.ditext.com/sellars/carus200.html.

[44] W. Sellars, FMPP I, §140.

[45] Qui plus est, 'sentir bleument n'implique nullement davantage être conscient de quelque chose *comme* bleu (*grossièrement* : *que* quelque chose est bleu) que respirer éternué-ment égale être conscient de quelque chose comme un éternuement' (W. Sellars, FMPP I, §152). Nous entrevoyons ici la théorie – très importante chez Sellars – *adverbiale* du déroulement fonctionnel de la sensation – du sentir.

réussir. Si la stratégie musicale à suivre se dévoilait dans l'évidence, comme un bouton expérientiel sur lequel on pourrait facilement appuyer à chaque fois que le musicien essaierait de créer quelque chose, alors il n'y aurait aucune *sublimation œuvrée* de la pulsion. Appuyer simplement sur un bouton ne peut qu'étouffer ou extirper la pulsion dans une satisfaction puérile, puisqu'un critère de réussite qui est toujours totalement préalablement évident est un critère de réussite qui ne permet ni qu'un projet n'élabore sa propre logique, ni, à vrai dire, que la moindre créativité ne se déchaîne. Une décision n'est plus une *décision* de plein fouet dès lors que les dés sont pipés.

(c.) Diagnose de 1938. Quelle est la cause des maux musicaux ?

Le raisonnement diagnostique d'Adorno dans son article précoce comporte une analyse que nous acceptons et une autre que nous rejetons. Nous acceptons sa conclusion – profondément perspicace – que la forme-valeur (ou plus simplement, le capital), sur le plan du phantasme inconscient, *nous cause à désirer et vénérer la médiation qui est la valeur d'échange comme si elle était une valeur d'usage immédiate*[46].

> Ce secret est le vrai secret du succès. Ce dernier est le simple reflet de ce que l'on paie sur le marché pour le produit : le consommateur adore véritablement l'argent qu'il a dépensé en échange d'un billet pour le concert de Toscanini. Il a lui-même « fait » le succès qu'il réifie et qu'il accepte comme un critère objectif sans pourtant se reconnaître en lui. [...] A vrai dire, la valeur d'échange s'impose d'une façon particulière dans le domaine des marchandise culturelles. Car ce domaine apparaît précisément dans le monde des marchandises comme étranger aux contraintes de l'échange, comme un domaine dans lequel il n'y a de rapport qu'immédiat avec les marchandises. C'est pourtant à cette seule illusion que les marchandises doivent leur valeur d'échange.[47]

[46] Par « immédiate » nous entendons : non-médiatisée et auto-donnant dans une transparence simple.

[47] CFM, p. 29-30.

Cependant, nous n'acceptons pas la conséquence tirée par l'Adorno de 1938, dans un moment de pessimisme très sévère, à savoir que sous ces conditions *toute* sublimation vraie a été rendue foncièrement impossible.

> C'est dans ce quiproquo que se constitue le caractère fétiche propre à la musique : les affects que provoque la valeur d'échange instituent l'apparence de l'immédiateté alors qu'en même temps, l'absence de relation à l'objet la dément. Cette absence de relation à l'objet a son fondement dans l'abstraction de la valeur d'échange. C'est d'une telle substitution sociale que dépendent toutes les satisfactions « psychologiques » ultérieures, tous les substituts de satisfaction.[48]

> Les moments partiels ne servent plus à la critique du tout qu'ils présupposent : ils préfèrent suspendre la critique exercée par la totalité esthétique qui s'est imposée à l'endroit de la totalité fragile de la société. L'unité synthétique leur est sacrifiée : ils ne produisent plus leur propre unité afin de la substituer à celle qui est réifiée mais se montrent au contraire complaisants à l'égard de celle-ci.[49]

> Que les « valeurs » soient consommées et provoquent des affects avant même que la conscience du consommateur ait saisi leurs qualités spécifiques, cela découle de leur caractère de marchandise.[50]

> Plus le principe de la valeur d'échange prive inexorablement l'homme de la valeur d'usage, plus la valeur d'échange cherche à se faire passer pour un objet de plaisir.[51]

---

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

De son propre gré, Adorno s'est voué à soutenir que la musique est synthétique et négatrice, ce qui implique que sa constructibilité s'apparente à la *spontanéité active*. Mais dans les développements que nous venons de citer, il maintient que le leurre de la valeur d'échange bloque la synthèse – apparemment parce que les gens n'arrivent plus à *désirer* un projet sublimatoire au lieu d'un plaisir puérile. Qui plus est, l'image de l'écran ou du voile suggère qu'il y ait quelque chose *derrière* le voile, une valeur d'usage que nous n'arrivons plus à saisir. Tout se passe dans ces passages comme si *une transparence à elle-même de l'acte de construction* a été *bloquée et perdue*.

Or, alors que nous avons plus haut passé en revue le *variant empirique* de la critique du Mythe du Donné – qui va déjà sans aucun doute à l'encontre de cette conjecture – Sellars pour l'occasion cible un champ plus vaste :

> De bien des choses on a dit qu'elles étaient « données » : les contenus sensibles [*sense contents*], les objets matériels, les universaux, les propositions, les liaisons réelles, les premiers principes, voire jusqu'à la donation [*givenness*] elle-même. De fait, il existe une certaine manière d'interpréter les situations que les philosophes analysent en ces termes, dont on peut dire qu'elle constitue le cadre du donné. Ce cadre a été un trait commun de la plupart des systèmes majeurs de philosophie, incluant, pour reprendre les expressions kantiennes, à la fois le « rationalisme dogmatique » et l'« empirisme sceptique ». Il a été, de fait, si dominant que peu de philosophes, s'il en fût, en ont été entièrement affranchis ; certainement pas Kant, et, soutiendrais-je, pas même Hegel, ce grand adversaire de l'« immédiateté ». Bien souvent ce que l'on attaque sous ce nom ne représente que des variétés spécifiques du « donné ». Les premiers principes connus par intuition, et les liaisons synthétiques nécessaires en furent les premières victimes. Et parmi ceux qui attaquent aujourd'hui « l'idée entière de donné » – et ils sont de plus en plus nombreux – beaucoup n'attaquent en fait que les données de sens. Car ils transfèrent à d'autres entités, disons aux objets physiques ou aux

> relations d'apparaître [*appearing*], les traits caractéristiques du « donné ».[52]

Alors, en suggérant que la valeur d'échange étrangle la synthèse transcendantale *à partir de l'extériorité du fonctionnement de cette synthèse transcendantale*, Adorno ne se contredit-t-il pas ? Les valeurs d'usage (les moyens aux fins qui vaillent d'être poursuivies) ne sont pas – nous argumentons – le genre de « choses » qui pourrait se cacher hors de notre portée, « derrière » l'obstruction d'un rideau ou d'un écran. Cette métaphore n'est pas la bonne, parce que la matière de la sublimation *n'est rien d'autre que la médiatisation elle-même, dans l'absence de toute « chose » non-médiatisée dans l'espoir en l'atteignant on « gratterait » la médiatisation (pour ainsi dire) avec les ongles*.[53] Malgré lui, Adorno conclut en 1938 en alignant la valeur d'usage avec le *plaisir*, tel que l'une comme l'autre ne peuvent qu'apparaître irrémédiablement perdus. Toutefois, d'après nous, le pessimisme sévère à ce moment de son parcours mord à l'hameçon du *variant intellectualiste* du Mythe du Donné. La conclusion « optimiste » que nous en

---

[52] W. Sellars, *Empirisme et philosophie de l'esprit*, p. 17-18. Traduction modifiée pour exprimer *givenness* par le terme « donation » plutôt que par celui de « donné ». Interpositions celles du traducteur.

[53] De manière éventuellement un peu étonnante, on peut faire appel à Lacan pour renforcer cet argument relativement « optimiste ». Dans un autre chevauchement avec la critique du Mythe du Donné de Sellars, Lacan enracine la source de la pulsion (la source de la compulsion « névrotique ») non pas dans la biologie mais plutôt dans l'opérativité propre à la médiatisation symbolique-cognitive. Nous en en tirons les postulats (a) que les « pathologies » de la médiatisation – telles que celles étudiées par Adorno – ne sauraient qu'être auto-infligées par la médiatisation sur elle-même, « dans son propre dos », ce qui fait que le fétiche de la marchandise ne correspond pas très bien à l'image d'un étranglement par un tentacule *extérieur*, et (b) que, loin d'avoir subi un embouteillage de la spontanéité, *les gens ne peuvent pas s'arrêter de penser, tout comme ils n'arriveraient jamais à s'empêcher de faire des choses*. (Nous en finissons donc en étant peu convaincu par l'idée que le « désœuvrement », l'*inoperosità*, soit une panacée politique.) Citons : « Si la pulsion peut être satisfaite sans avoir atteint ce qui, au regard d'une totalisation biologique de la fonction, serait la satisfaction à sa fin de reproduction, c'est qu'elle est pulsion partielle, et que *son but n'est point autre chose que ce retour en circuit*. » (J. Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, p. 201. Nous soulignons la ligne du texte qui est citée dans *WW*.)

tirons est que rien – aucun tentacule obscène – ne peut empêcher que même la *fétichisation de la nouveauté* soit traitée *par l'art lui-même*.

La réflexion d'Adorno sur la *temporalité*, telle qu'elle se développe vers les années soixante, nous permet ensuite de lancer une interrogation sur ce thème. La *succession* est le médium, ou la forme même, de la musique. Cependant, si le temps n'est pas, *pace* Bergson, un « en-soi » mais – comme croit Hegel et comme l'Adorno de la *Dialectique Négative* (de 1966) pourrait l'accorder – plutôt un *effet de médiation*, comment alors la *connaissance* des temporalités (musicales ; non-linéaire ; historique-« rupturale » à l'instar d'Althusser ou de Bachelard ; thermodynamique-boltzmannienne) se rabat-elle sur le procès de médiatisation, comment l'affecte-t-elle en retour ? Il s'agit d'une question qui commence à se poser dès notre quatrième Chapitre, où nous proposons qu'une composition de 1954 de Iannis Xenakis, *Metastasis*, construit et découvre une nouvelle irréversibilité logique musicale concernant l'accélération de l'orchestre et la densité du son. S'intéressant à Einstein, Xenakis articule (l'idée de) la réversibilité de la masse et l'énergie avec l'irréversibilité même de la succession linéaire propre à la temporalité musicale, et ainsi déterre une *nouvelle contradiction musicale*[54].

E. Abrégé des Sections III et IV, Chapitres 5-8. Pistes de solution

Ei. Sommaire de la Section III

Le Chapitre 5 dessine une ligne qui mène de la conceptualisation analogique des « limites » et des « bornes » chez Kant (dans les *Prolégomènes* de 1783) jusqu'à certaines remarques paradoxales d'Hegel concernant le *devoir-être* dans sa *Logique.* Pour Kant une *limite* n'est qu'une négation de la complétude d'une magnitude, telle que l'incomplétude de nos connaissances mathématiques et naturelles n'empêche nullement que ces champs

[54] Cette contradiction peut se dire « logiquement irréversible » en ce sens qu'auprès d'elle le principe du tiers exclu se réhabilite : il n'y a pas de décomposition analytique ampliative qui saurait nier et réviser de manière plus concrète le rapport qualitatif de ses déterminations. Ce rapport peut se dire donc « logiquement nécessaire » dans un sens hégélien (ce qui revient à dire, dans le jargon du philosophe, qu'il est constitué par une négativité pleinement auto-supprimant, ou réfléchie-en-soi). La question de la relation qui se tient entre, d'un côté, le déroulement de la performance de la partition de Xenakis, ou de son écoute, et, de l'autre côté, l'irréversibilité logique qu'elle permet de découvrir (chose appauvrie sur le plan sensoriel, ou plutôt, chose non-sensorielle), est sans doute une question cruciale – mais cette étude ne parvient qu'à la frôler, comme se verra en fin de ce résumé.

d'enquête puissent se transcender en progressant au gré des découvertes de nouvelles connaissances (à ceci près que Kant croit que ces connaissances ne sont que des connaissances des *apparences*, et non pas des *noumènes*). Une *borne*, par contre, est un obstacle « solide » (même s'il a été *déduit* comme solide plutôt que *donné* comme tel). Une borne est donc l'analogue d'un signe « Défense d'entrer ! » affiché sur un mur de briques impénétrable, ou indiquant à la raison pure les questions métaphysiques qu'elle ne doit pas se poser dans le sérieux, puisqu'elles lui feront se perdre dans le désir de connaître l'inconnaissable. D'où un *devoir-être* comme « *comme si* » : la raison brûle d'envie de satisfaire sa curiosité, mais son devoir moral revient à faire avec un *seul idéal régulateur, non-actuel* qui lui oblige à se comporter *comme si* des connaissances achevées et complètes pourraient être atteintes.

Hegel fulmine contre les compromis honteux qu'il perçoit dans ce *comme si*. À ses yeux, déterminer une restriction, c'est déjà en quelque sorte la dépasser. Un rocher *est* seulement un rocher parce qu'il *se différencie* constitutivement de ce qui n'est pas lui, par exemple de l'herbe ou de l'acide qui pourrait le corroder. Mais pourtant, Hegel dit dans les mêmes pages que le *devoir-être* reçoit néanmoins ses pleins droits *dans la sphère de la finitude*, la sphère des erreurs, des quiproquos, et des compromis souvent un peu sales. Le « devoir-être » *est* – cela implique-t-il que l'être *doit* seulement être ? Dans le but d'éclaircir cette contradiction, nous allons réitérer, de façon quasiment exhaustive, le sixième Chapitre de notre étude. Il s'agit d'une exposition des repères conceptuels hégéliens que nous jugeons fondamentaux et immanquables. Le Chapitre est constitué de trois parties (I, II, et III) précédé par un préambule (*Nulla*).[55]

CHAPITRE 6
LA NON-IDENTITE DE L'IDENTITE :
HEGEL, BADIOU ET L'INFINI QUANTITATIF

Nulla.

Infinis « bon » et « mauvais »

Le leurre d'une erreur recèle-t-il le moindre indice sur comment le nier pour le

[55] Ces matériaux sont parus dans un recueil dirigé par Anthony Feneuil, Anna Longo et Bruno Trentini, *Le Paradoxe de la finitude*, Sestro San Giovanni, Éditions Mimésis, 2019.

dépasser ou s'agit-il d'un déchet destiné tout entier à la poubelle ? La question exige qu'on formule précisément ce qu'on entend par « dépasser ». Le mot implique que l'erreur puisse se transformer en tremplin. En revanche, estimer que les fautes n'aient guère à nous apprendre, cela impliquerait que se lancer de ce tremplin n'aurait que très peu d'intérêt. Parler d'« erreur » perdra peut-être son sens. Il s'agira dans cet article de soutenir, en trois étapes, que ce que G. W. F. Hegel propose en réponse à cette question – et la critique qu'en offre Alain Badiou – nous permet de mettre en cause la manière dont on lie le concept d'*infini* à celui de hasard, et à ceux d'identité et de non-identité. Des conséquences – de prime abord incongrues – en seront tirées, dans les domaines de la chimie et de la critique de l'économie politique.

Une telle interrogation s'inscrit parmi les enjeux de la distinction entre deux types d'infini, « bon » et « mauvais ». Cette distinction peut se jouer à plusieurs échelles. De manière générale, je tenterai dans un premier temps une lecture de ce que Hegel lui-même en dit, peu après l'ouverture du premier livre, celui sur l'« être », de sa *Science de la logique*, publié en 1812, et remanié entre 1827 et 1831. Hegel y esquisse, d'une façon dépouillée d'objets spécifiques, les schémas dialectiques purs des deux infinis, tout en les articulant non seulement avec l'« être », mais aussi avec le « non-être ». Au premier coup d'œil, le projet entrepris par Hegel, qui s'était amorcé avec l'« être pur », consiste à en déduire, dans le troisième livre du traité, un limpide « concept du concept », empruntant au milieu la passerelle de la *Doctrine de l'essence*. Cette interprétation est sans doute exacte. Cependant, que la déduction ait le caractère d'un prétendu déferlement linéaire ne va pas tout à fait de soi. De toute façon, il faut certainement mettre en relief l'opacité cognitive kantienne si l'on veut poser la question de l'erreur sans tomber dans le présupposé naïf qui voudrait que la représentation fasse *correspondre* un mot qu'on énonce à un objet qui nous est simplement donné par l'expérience, indépendamment des opérations mêmes de la représentation. Une deuxième question se pose alors, visant à circonscrire l'intelligibilité de la première. Cela garde-t-il une signification, de soutenir que l'on peut extraire de la vérité de nos fautes cognitives, de ces leurres de la seule apparence trompeuse, lorsque l'on se refuse à croire que notre notion de ce qui semble être le cas pourrait *correspondre* à des objets d'expérience possible qui s'en distingueraient ? Pour y répondre, je me pencherai dans ma deuxième partie sur un commentaire critique du développement de la *Logique* par Badiou dans *L'Être et l'Événement*[56].

[56] Alain Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement (ÊÉ)*, Paris, Seuil, 1988.

Ce qui unit Hegel et Badiou, c'est la conviction que dans n'importe quelle circonstance, pour franchir la menace d'une répétition stérile, il faut passer de la finitude – celle du point sur lequel on est coincé au départ – à l'infinitude. Toutefois, Badiou attaque la notion hégélienne d'infini considéré comme ce qui « se rapporte-à-soi », notion circulaire qui rappelle la figure antique du serpent qui se mord la queue, et affirme plutôt qu'il s'agirait tout d'abord simplement d'un mot par lequel on désigne une propriété qui reste à démontrer, et qu'on ne peut pas considérer comme acquise. Badiou insiste sur une discontinuité aiguë dans le procédé par lequel la pensée ontologique articule une idée cohérente d'une structuration de l'être qu'on peut légitimement nommer « infini ». Afin de s'assurer de la réinsertion de cet acte de nomination au sein du modèle (mathématique) à travers lequel elle comprend son propre domaine de déroulement, il exige une *décision*, sans stimulus facilement repérable, à passer de ce qui est discernable et classable – et donc fini – à ce qui ne l'est pas. Hegel, contrairement à Badiou, laisserait entrer l'inconsistance et la contradiction en plein cœur de l'« être ». Il soutient que le fini, paradoxalement, *n'est pas* – ou *pas vraiment* – et, dans son jargon, en tant que « se supprimant lui-même », ce fini n'est rien d'autre que l'envers de l'infini. Ainsi, une différence entre *être* et *non-être* traverse n'importe quelle chose finie. Cette négativité nous permet de corriger ce que la chose nous semble être, en s'emparant des indices, fournis par ses déterminations explicitement manifestes, des rapports de dépendance et d'incompatibilité tenues par celles-ci avec des autres prédicats *non*-données. Mais Badiou trouve suspect l'utilisation de ces miettes déterminées. Pour lui, c'est la capacité, non-qualitative, des *mathématiques*, à schématiser l'indiscernabilité et l'indécidabilité qui, à elle seule, permettrait la *rupture* séparatrice qui se détache du fini, et, du même coup, ouvre vers l'exploration de l'infini.

Qui plus est, Badiou restreindrait la modalité concevable du dépassement fécond strictement au *contingent*. Or, la négativité hégélienne se mêle avec les positivités catégorielles déterminées. En conséquence, Badiou l'interprète de façon sévèrement critique, comme une *garantie sous-entendue* de la réussite du progrès cognitif. Il croit que Hegel saisit le dépassement comme une floraison nécessaire, organique et *inévitable*, dans laquelle chaque instance serait enracinée confortablement ayant comme point de départ ce qui est donné et discernable sur le plan fini. Cette perspective, Badiou la trouve rébarbative. Que l'on puisse démentir l'idée que le dépassement désiré puisse très bien échouer pour toujours lui paraîtrait complaisant, sinon réactionnaire. Puisqu'il n'ose pas un saut interventionnel – un lancer de dés à l'aveugle – mais s'installe plutôt dans une

continuité avec les déterminations qualitatives finies, Hegel finirait en réitérant, pour ainsi dire comme un perroquet, les habitudes normative-épistémiques qui lui ont été imposées par le régime de discernabilité et de classification qui est, en l'occurrence, communément représenté dans le cadre idéologique actuel. Il remanierait des éléments familiers dans des variations bricolées, aux fins modestement utilitaires (ou pire), mais il n'arriverait pas à *créer* la nouveauté inconditionnée qu'il souhaite atteindre.

Cependant, de cette manière, il me semble que Badiou passe trop vite sur la question des erreurs auprès de ce qui est connu *a posteriori.* Alors qu'il a sans doute raison de s'obstiner à affirmer que nous nous devons d'une *indifférence* envers la finitude qui ne saurait s'effectuer qu'au travers de *décisions*, dans *L'Être et l'Événement* son rejet des ressources conceptuelles offertes par Hegel est un peu hâtif. Concernant la question de l'erreur et de la vérité dans l'*a posteriori*, nous allons tout d'abord considérer un exemple donné par Badiou dans *Logique des mondes*[57]. Nous sommes invités à considérer l'apparaître du rouge automnal d'une vigne lorsqu'elle perd son vert estival. Pour Hegel, l'erreur ici consisterait à croire que le changement est factice, *sans nécessité.* En effet, il y a des règles, non-manifestes, que nous devons postuler afin de comprendre la cause de la variation de la couleur, notamment les lois chimiques qui déterminent la pigmentation du feuillage en fonction de la température et de la lumière du soleil. Il s'agit d'une « négation déterminée » à travers laquelle « [l]e monde existant s'élève calmement jusqu'à un royaume de lois »[58]. Or, Badiou refuse cette négation, puisqu'elle dépend d'une continuité avec le donné :

> Non, le monde existant ne « s'élève » à nul royaume. Son « être-là varié » n'a pas de subsister séparé qui en serait l'effectuation négative. Ce qui fait l'existence n'est que la logique contingente d'un monde que rien ne relève, et où [...] la négation apparaît comme extériorité pure.[59]

Comme nous le verrons par la suite, Badiou se prive ainsi de tout appui sur ce qu'il appelle la « négativité intérieure », c'est-à-dire la puissance cognitive supposée par

[57] A. Badiou, *Logiques des mondes. L'Être et l'Événement, 2*, Paris, Seuil, 2006.

[58] G. W. F. Hegel, *Science de la logique. Deuxième livre – la doctrine de l'essence*. Cité par Badiou dans *Logiques des mondes*, p. 164.

[59] A. Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*, p. 164.

Hegel lorsqu'il explique le fonctionnement de la détermination qualitative en générale. Notamment, dans la suppression ou l'annulation de la notion immédiate de quantité mathématisable, et sa conservation sur un plan de savoir plus élevé : sa « relève » *(Aufhebung)*. Ce qui provoque l'incrédulité sardonique de Badiou, c'est que Hegel exprime *cette* relève en particulier *comme une effectuation de l'infini vrai*. Hegel propose qu'à travers la négativité « intériorisante » – relationnelle – la quantité serait mise en rapport avec sa propre essence, ce qui montre sa *différence déterminée* par rapport à ce-qui-n'est-pas-la-quantité : la qualité. Badiou ne l'accepte pas. Selon lui, la négativité doit être purement « extérieure », non-qualitative, non-dialectique, et non-relationnelle.

Cette extériorité est stipulée *ontologiquement* par Badiou qui s'appuie sur la théorie des ensembles de Zermelo-Fraenkel lui garantissant la consistance mathématique afin de passer indifféremment à travers la ligne de séparation entre finitude et infini. Elle s'avère ainsi – dans un paradoxe apparent – entièrement *positive*. Il s'agit du noyau problématique du débat. Dans la mesure où elles portent sur les célèbres déclarations dédaigneuses prononcées par Hegel à propos de l'indifférence « mécanique » des mathématiques à l'égard de la différence qualitative conceptuellement instructive, les scrupules – voire réfutations – de Badiou sont retentissants. Mais il me semble que, comme l'indique Gérard Lebrun, ses critiques ne sont pas complètement justifiées. De plus, il y a des raisons d'interroger le rôle que Badiou attribue à la *consistance* dans *L'Être et l'Événement*. Ces raisons concernent sa stipulation et le fait qu'elle soit traitée comme synonyme de l'« être ». Ici, afin de se débarrasser, avec une férocité qui est certes admirable, de la transparence et fausse évidence du donné, Badiou entasse la *négativité* avec l'*indifférence*, les identifiant l'une à l'autre, de telle sorte que la négativité se trouve neutralisée et que tout est rendu ontologiquement *positif*. Mais si la positivité reste – malgré l'ingénuité de Badiou – un autre nom de l'identique-à-soi, sa proposition de principe *ontologique* se trouve remise en cause. Car, selon Hegel, il n'est pas obligatoire de séparer l'être et le non-être : Hegel ne les *oppose* pas. Pour revenir à l'exemple de la vigne, nous nous demanderons donc si l'enjeu majeur n'est pas la question de l'intelligibilité de *l'apparent fortuit hasardeux*. Il me semble que cet enjeu n'est pas sans rapport à une autre erreur qui fait croire, dans le cadre du néolibéralisme, que la liberté se tient d'elle-même auprès de l'individu isolé, censé être entouré d'un océan aléatoire inintelligiblement chaotique : ce que nous essaierons de montrer à la fin de notre comparaison des stratégies de Badiou et Hegel.

I.

Hegel : Le « quelque-chose » qualitatif

Dans la *Logique,* Hegel vise à épurer la pensée de tout objet sensible supposé lui être donné tout en lui étant extérieur. Ce dépouillement est censé faire en sorte que le seul objet scruté par le discours conceptuel soit le discours conceptuel lui-même. L'exposé concernant les deux infinis commence donc avec le « quelque-chose » qualitatif : il s'agit de la *forme* présupposée par n'importe quel concept de ce qu'est *la déterminité* qualitative-catégorielle. La déterminité est au fond ce qui distingue un « quoi » ou *quidditas* spécifique d'un rien non-spécifiable indéterminé. La thèse de Hegel va être que le quelque-chose outrepasse nécessairement sa borne en supprimant en lui-même la marque du vide qui est son Autre. La négativité dans le quelque-chose est celle de ce qu'il n'est pas. En fait, le quelque-chose est au départ déterminé d'une manière négative par son Autre extérieur, ce qui ne lui est pas identique ou ce qu'il n'est pas.

> Quelque-chose est ainsi un être-là immédiat se rapportant à soi, et il a une limite, tout d'abord, en tant qu'il fait face à autre chose : elle est le non-être de l'Autre, non pas du quelque-chose lui-même ; il limite en elle son Autre.[60]

« *[C]elui-ci* [le quelque-chose] *est par elle* [sa limite] *ce qu'il est*, il a dans *elle sa qualité* »[61]. Mais, faute d'un dépassement affirmatif, par lequel le quelque-chose obtient son rapport-à-soi positif, cette « première négation » reste seulement provisoire, car unilatérale et inachevée. Le non-être de l'Autre qui s'inscrit au sein du quelque-chose – le quelque-chose n'étant rien de plus à cette étape que cet étiquetage même – est le non-être d'un non-identique quelconque, lui-même privé de détermination, qui n'est donc qu'un vide extérieur et flou. La limite n'est qu'une *borne* : A n'est pas non-A. Mais non-A *n'est rien*. « Or, la chose *est*. »[62] Le sel *est* salé, plutôt que sucré ; Jupiter *est* gazeuse, plutôt que tellurique. Alors, il va falloir la « négation de la négation », le « franchissement du non-être »[63] qui est le dépassement de la borne : A *est* la négation de non-A. Il s'ensuit une définition : « Le quelque-chose, posé, avec sa limite immanente, comme la

[60] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 184.

[61] *Ibid*.

[62] A. Badiou*, ÊÉ*, p. 183.

[63] *Ibid*.

contradiction de lui-même par laquelle il est renvoyé et expulsé au-delà de lui-même, est le *fini*. »[64] Curieusement, Hegel appelle ce caractère écarté-de-soi du quelque-chose son « devoir-être »[65].

Comment ceci se comprend-t-il ? Gardons en mémoire que, bien que la coïncidence du sujet et de l'objet, et donc celle de la pensée avec l'être, soit achevée à la fin de la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*, ce qui constitue le point de départ de la *Logique*, nous sommes tout de même obligés de traverser et retraverser constamment les *concepts* qui s'égrènent dans l'immédiat naïf sous le drapeau de « l'être », afin de lever les contradictions superficielles qui s'y apparentent pour buter sur celles qui lui sont essentielles. Nous apprenons ainsi comment l'être *doit* se déterminer pour rendre la conceptualisation possible. Souvenons-nous, à ce propos, que Kant avait critiqué, comme « rhapsodique », toute tentative de cataloguer les propriétés constitutives d'un système quelconque qui omettrait de déduire ses termes d'un principe nécessaire, faute de quoi nous nous trouvons dépourvus de la possibilité d'achever la liste d'une manière systématique[66]. Or, Hegel ne veut pas esquiver ce moment d'incertitude mais plutôt le laisser entrer au sein du travail du concept, et – en quelque sorte – au sein de l'être. Étant donné que Hegel juge la négativité comme un moment incontournable, il est possible d'offrir une lecture « métaphysique » minimale : l'apparaître trompeur – la semblance *(Schein)* – est objectif avant même que la subjectivité, ou la conscience-de-soi, n'entre en scène[67]. Et une chose *finie* est forcément toujours en train de s'effriter ou de disparaître, de *changer*, c'est-à-dire de *devoir n'être que* ce qu'elle est et de *devoir être* quelque-chose d'autre. De toute façon, il est clair que, si l'on se tient étroitement à la définition hégélienne de chose finie, et seulement finie, cette chose se contredit si profondément qu'elle ne peut que *passer* ou périr : « l'être des choses finies, en tant que tel, consiste, pour elles, à avoir le germe de leur disparition comme leur être-dans-soi ; l'heure de leur naissance est l'heure de leur mort. »[68]

---

[64] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 186.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

[66] Par exemple, dans la *Critique de la raison pure*, trad. fr. Alain Renaut, Flammarion, 2006, A80-81/B106-B107, p. 163-164.

[67] Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science de la logique. Deuxième livre – la doctrine de l'essence*, trad. fr. Gwendoline Jarczyk et Pierre-Jean Labarrière, Paris, Kimé, 2010, p. 13-16.

[68] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ* p. 187.

La négation de la négation

« Sucré » n'est certes pas la même chose que « tellurique », mais, cela étant dit, les deux termes n'entrent que dans un rapport de négation qui est assez flou, sans intérêt.

> Le jugement négatif n'est donc pas la négation totale [...] Lorsque, par exemple, on dit que la rose *n*'est *pas* rouge, seule la *déterminité* du prédicat est par là niée et séparée de l'universalité qui appartient pareillement à celui-ci ; la sphère universelle, la *couleur*, est conservée ; si la rose n'est pas rouge, il est admis, en l'occurrence, qu'elle a une couleur et une autre couleur ; suivant cette sphère universelle, le jugement est encore positif.[69]

Exemple simple de la quintessence de la « négation de la négation », la *négation déterminée*. Lebrun l'étoffe :

> Il n'est pas vrai que, par rapport à A, *tous les autres* soient seulement des non-A anonymes et équivalents ; il n'est pas vrai que le « sujet » diffère de l'« objet » comme il diffère d'une « feuille de papier », que l'« identité » soit séparée de la « différence » au même titre que de n'importe quel autre concept.[70]

Il est impossible que les propriétés des choses se déterminent *seulement* en se limitant mutuellement, *seulement* en s'excluant l'une l'autre à travers un élément *indifférent*. L'infini ne peut être une totalité substantielle déjà-donnée, comme un « gâteau », exprimée par une détermination négative *purement* différentielle-oppositionnelle.

Si tel était le cas, nous n'aurions aucun moyen de nous interroger sur la facticité des catégories. Il est vrai que cyan et turquoise se distinguent mutuellement, réflexivement. Cependant, le zoom sur le spectre chromatique doit s'arrêter quelque part : pourquoi là, comme ça ? De plus, la « couleur » est *déterminable*, un genre qui discerne

---

[69] G. W. F. Hegel, *Science de la logique. Troisième livre – le concept*, trad. fr. Bernard Bourgeois, Paris, Vrin, 2016, p. 88.

[70] Gérard Lebrun, *La Patience du concept. Essai sur le discours hégélien*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, p. 279.

ses espèces, les nuances. Alors, pourquoi certains déterminables sont-ils réels et effectifs et d'autres pas ? Le « spin » d'un quark est un déterminable qui n'était nullement donné empiriquement avant d'être laborieusement construit. L'« argent » et – disons – le « taux de change de livres turques en dollars » sont déterminables, mais ne se déduisent d'aucune nécessité naturelle. On voit que la « deuxième négation », la négation de la négation, est liée à l'*effectivité* – contrastée avec la seule possibilité abstraite – aussi et surtout quand celle-ci parait fortuite. C'est pourquoi Hegel se rapproche et pourtant s'éloigne de Fichte. Il demeure sous l'influence de Fichte en affirmant que nous ne pouvons pas accepter une facticité comme Absolue sauf en la soumettant à notre propre activité conceptuelle négatrice et constructive. Mais il se heurte à l'exclusion oppositive à travers laquelle, à partir d'une indépendance supposée, le Moi se pose lui-même comme déterminé par le Non-moi, et exclut ainsi le Non-moi pour, ensuite, le déterminer de façon inéluctable comme un opposé dépourvu de contenu positif.

Le « mauvais » infini qualitatif

Nous avons vu que la chose finie, une fois scindée, se trouve dans un espace indéterminé et évidé. Toutefois, au lieu de s'y perdre totalement, il reste discernable, bien qu'il ne soit plus un quelque-chose fini mais plutôt un *rien*. Le quelque-chose se désintègre, mais demeure marqué du cachet de la contradiction qu'il est, même au sein de cet Autre évidé. Ce fait d'être partagé entre le non-être et l'être n'est que « la même scission de l'*être-en-soi* et de l'*être-là* que l'est la borne »[71]. La marque-de-rien – rebondissement étonnant – se trouve de nouveau enclavée par une borne, du fait même de ne plus être et de ne pas être quelque-chose de fini. Mais cela veut dire que quelque-chose de fini s'est reconstitué. Nous revenons donc au point de départ : il est encore une fois expulsé de lui-même, et ça continue dans une répétition ennuyeuse. Il s'agit bien d'une *série infinie de répétitions*, ce que Hegel nomme le faux ou « mauvais » infini. Comme le dit Badiou, c'est un dépassement inlassable, « automatiste », qui reproduit toujours un « encore », encore un *quidditas* dont la déterminité ne se libère pas de celle de son voisin[72]. La série n'arrive pas à se redresser de son propre gré pour s'élever à un déphasage ou à un saut vers la réalisation de son propre caractère infini.

L'Autre qui avait au début déterminé le quelque-chose s'est ainsi révélé être *le vide indéterminé où se répète le fini*. En effet, le problème selon Hegel est que l'infini

[71] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 195.

[72] A. Badiou, *ÊÉ*, p. 183.

demeure ici conceptualisé comme *au-delà* de la *déterminité en tant que telle* pris en agrégat. Ce même infini s'avère donc paradoxalement borné par la déterminité-en-bloc *en face* de lui à laquelle il se confronte, et se voit ainsi *rendu fini*. Ce qui se passe n'est rien d'autre que le bredouillement du fini, qui se déchire et se lance en dehors de lui-même, seulement pour s'y retrouver. C'est un carrousel où le fini *devrait être* infini mais ne l'est pas vraiment, et où l'infini (faux) *devrait l'être* aussi, mais, enclavé, *se contredit* et s'écroule vers la déterminité, son Autre duquel il a été (faussement) isolé. Il s'agit d'un *infini fini* qui bascule en une dialectique ratée vers une réification en étant.

En effet, aux yeux de Hegel, cette triste affaire ne peut être écartée qu'en abandonnant l'erreur de l'*entendement* qui consiste à exclure l'infini du fini, *au-delà* de lui. Cette perspective, contrairement à celle de la *raison spéculative*, reste figée dans une réflexion extérieure aux choses elles-mêmes, et tend à reculer devant les contradictions. C'est ainsi que s'ouvre la voie, plus en aval, à l'absolutisation et la substantialisation de cet infini réifié, de sorte que le domaine entier du particulier fini ne peut que s'engloutir en lui. Dans la « philosophie de l'Identité », qui s'apparente au schellingianisme, la coïncidence du connaître et du connu est saisissable dans l'immédiateté esthétique, pré-intentionnelle, de l'œuvre d'art. Cependant, pour Hegel cela revient à brouiller toute distinction dans l'obscurité d'une indifférenciation répandue, et à faire de l'Absolu n'importe quoi, une stratégie banale tout aussi bien que productrice, une facticité reçue tout aussi bien que produite.

Le « bon » infini qualitatif

Or, en se débarrassant du présupposé de l'entendement qu'il *faut* qu'il y ait de la différence qualitative entre fini et infini, on gagne la possibilité de les concevoir se pliant l'un dans l'autre et s'injectant mutuellement comme dans un chiasme. Le dépassement inlassable doit être lui-même dépassé, en allant *au-delà de l'au-delà*[73].

> [C]hacun d'entre eux est, en lui-même, cette unité, et cela seulement comme *suppression* de lui-même, en quoi aucun des deux ne saurait avoir par rapport à l'autre un privilège qui serait celui de l'être-en-soi et de l'être-là affirmatif. Ainsi qu'on l'a montré précédemment, la finité est seulement en tant que mouvement d'aller au-dèla de soi ; en elle, est donc contenu l'infinité, l'Autre

[73] Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 204.

> d'elle-même. Tout aussi bien, l'infinité est seulement en tant que mouvement d'aller au-delà du fini ; elle n'a de signification que comme la relation négative au fini, elle contient donc essentiellement son Autre et elle est, par conséquent, en elle, l'Autre d'elle-même. Le fini n'est pas supprimé par l'infini comme par une puissance présente hors de lui, mais c'est son infinité que de se supprimer lui-même.[74]

Le concept d'infini comme *vide extérieur* – et en même temps comme supra-substance – manquait de cohérence. La stratégie de Hegel consiste donc, pour ainsi dire, à évider l'Autre vide, à le dégonfler. Le non-être, ou non-choséité, qui est l'Autre vide, au début paradoxalement réifié en hyper-chose qui « poignardait » le quelque-chose fini à partir de son extérieur, va être définitivement dégagé de lui. Pour Hegel, la vraie infinité *est seulement* dans la mesure où l'incomplétude de la finité se rapporte à soi en s'annulant, et se conservant, dans une nouvelle incomplétude finie. Ainsi l'infinité effective n'est *rien d'autre* que l'autodépassement du fini, qui se supprime lui-même.

Comme Badiou le suggère à la suite de Lacan, le meilleur modèle topologique du type de ce rapport dialectique est le *ruban de Möbius*[75]. Il s'agit d'une bande plate de deux surfaces, recto et verso, qui se rejoint en un cercle, mais en se tordant d'une manière telle que chaque surface coule dans l'autre. Intériorité et extériorité s'infiltrent l'une dans l'autre. L'infinité, c'est la torsion par laquelle la finité s'annule et se refait. Il faut que le vide-Autre « au-delà » se supprime pour que le vrai infini soit atteint, afin que le fini devienne « pour-soi » – auto-affirmation – en se faisant le biais par lequel s'effectue cette « *négation* de l'au-delà »[76]. Cela revient à dire que ce qui reste d'extériorité *simplement* extérieure, faussement déjà-donné en séparation métaphysique et faisant étalage avec ostentation d'une altérité se voulant législatrice, se voit réduit – on le verra par la suite – au Zéro inerte par la négation de la négation.

Répétitionnel de la répétition ou négativité se rapportant à soi ?

[74] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 208.

[75] Cf. Badiou, Bellasson & Mossot, *The Rational Kernel of the Hegelian Dialectic,* tr. ang. Tzuchien Tho, Melbourne, Re.press, 2011 [1978], 58-59; Badiou, *Théorie du sujet*, Paris, Seuil, 1982, p. 54.

[76] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 208.

Dans *L'Être et l'Événement*, ce n'est qu'à contrecœur que Badiou admire ce « coup de génie de Hegel »[77]. Selon son interprétation, l'opération par laquelle Hegel récupère le bégaiement de la mauvaise répétition en le retournant en bonne infinité se fait précisément à travers la *répétition* elle-même. À saisir expressément la répétition et à la thématiser, constate Badiou, Hegel réussit à tirer de l'automatisme la capacité même à se répéter : son *effectivité*, « le répétitionnel de la répétition, en tant qu'autre du vide »[78]. Le vide dans la lecture de Badiou a deux fonctionnements à la fois. D'abord – la fonction que Badiou approuve – comme lieu extérieur raturé et lâché en non-relation par la répétition. À travers l'explicitation de l'inerte neutralité non-déterminatrice du lieu de son inscription, l'opérativité de la répétition brute se rapporte à elle-même comme telle, et s'affirme autonome. Badiou attribue ainsi à Hegel une *conceptualisation déductive* de la répétition dans sa pureté *en tant que répétition*. C'est la négativité qui traverse le quelque-chose qualitatif – plutôt qu'une négativité venue d'ailleurs – qui permet que son tic mécanique soit *conçu* à travers des inférences rationnelles, non-mécaniques : il n'y a pas de « vide » sans une instance qui s'en distingue, et la dialectique du quelque-chose qualitatif a montré que l'instance minimale va être répétitive ; le *lieu extérieur vide* existe grâce à la répétition tout aussi bien que la répétition existe grâce au *lieu extérieur vide*. En démontrant que le vide n'est que le « blanc » où la répétition brute s'effectue d'une manière indépendante, Hegel réfute que la déterminité de la finité lui soit octroyée passivement de l'extérieur. Dans le perspectif squelettique propre à *La logique de l'être*, *toutes* les déterminités plus qualitativement riches que la répétition brute n'en sont que des complexifications (le mauvais infini recèle le bon). La neutralisation du vide ici a donc une grande portée. Tandis que Georges Bataille soutenait qu'il peut y avoir une « négativité sans emploi », qui nous frapperait d'une paresse venue de l'extérieur de la médiatisation, ou de son épuisement, « comme devant un mur »[79], Badiou, en revanche, soutient que la négativité extérieure ne peut ressembler à un mur, parce qu'elle n'est *rien*. Ainsi tombe la couronne illusoirement législatrice de l'extériorité simple.

La seconde fonction du vide hégélien, dans la lecture de Badiou – qui prend maintenant un virage durement critique – est celle d'une virtualité surabondante,

[77] A. Badiou*, ÊÉ*, p. 185.

[78] A. Badiou*, ÊÉ*, p. 186.

[79] Georges Bataille, *Lettre à X., chargé d'un cours sur Hegel…*, dans l'appendice au *Coupable*, Gallimard, 1961, p. 188. Le destinataire X. était Alexandre Kojève.

prétendument supposée par Hegel, où se concentre en « pure présence »[80] la plénitude donnée-non-donnée de tout ce qui est absent. Badiou est d'accord avec Hegel pour dégonfler l'Autre extérieur et pour donner le nom de « vide » à l'infini, puisqu'il indique la « polarité transfinie »[81] de la mauvaise alternance. Toutefois, à cette époque, chez Badiou, « virtualité » est un gros mot, puisqu'il argumente que le terme suppose sans justification une garantie de créativité réussie[82]. Il pense donc qu'ici le vide se trouve regonflé, de nouveau imprégné de la productivité métaphysique, subrepticement postulée, dont il a été chargé à travers sa première fonction de démentir. Il s'agit d'une variante d'une caricature de Hegel assez répandue, mais il me semble que les preuves sont minces. Le fait de considérer que le pour-soi hégélien, qui se-rapporte-à-soi et s'auto-supprime, soit synonyme de « virtualité subjective », ou de « contraction en virtualité », « générative » et « intrinsèque », et de « présence »[83], permet à Badiou d'étayer hâtivement un double portrait de Hegel non seulement en optimiste pieux mais aussi en acrobate rusé. Le traitement par Badiou du destin de l'Autre-vide dans la première fonction qu'il y attribue est pénétrant, voire indispensable. Mais il sera difficile de reconnaître dans le premier livre de la *Logique* un théologien sournois qui souhaite « résoudre le problème » du mauvais infini à tout prix « sans disjoindre la continuité dialectique »[84].

Le vide extérieur reste démuni, non-fécond. Si l'infinité est, « en elle, l'Autre d'elle-même », et « en tant qu'Autre du vide être-autre, en tant que négation de la négation, retour à soi et relation à soi-même »[85] – « pour-soi » –, j'argumenterais que ce n'est nullement grâce à l'insertion en cachette de quelque virtualité ou subjectivité rassurante. Bien au contraire, désubstantialiser l'infini avec une telle ténacité que le fait Hegel dans ces parties de la *Logique*, c'est le rendre *inutile*, précisément en enlevant toute possibilité de nous montrer *comment* dépasser telle ou telle contrainte. L'infini n'est plus donateur de critères spécifiques de réussite (ni d'échec). Si l'Autre abstrait, séparé, ne peut obliger le quelque-chose à s'affirmer pour s'outrepasser, alors il faut que le quelque-

[80] A. Badiou*, ÊÉ*, p. 187.

[81] A. Badiou*, ÊÉ*, p. 189.

[82] « [J]e maintiens que les formes du multiple sont […] toujours actuelles, que le virtuel n'existe pas ». Badiou, *Deleuze. « La clameur de l'être »*, Fayard, 1997, réédité en 2010, p. 69.

[83] A. Badiou*, ÊÉ*, p. 186, 187, 183.

[84] A. Badiou*, ÊÉ*, p. 185.

[85] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 208.

chose le fasse lui-même. Et pour Hegel, cela peut se faire seulement parce que l'être lui-même s'avère tenir *du non-être*, sous la forme d'une *négativité qui se nie elle-même*. Il le dit de la relève mutuelle du fini et de l'infini :

> Cette suppression [...] n'est pas le changement ou l'être-autre en général, pas la suppression du *quelque-chose*. Ce en quoi le fini se supprime est l'infini en tant qu'il est la négation de la finité ; mais celle-ci est, depuis longtemps, elle-même seulement l'être-là, déterminé comme un *non-être*. C'est donc seulement la *négation* qui se *supprime* dans la *négation*. Ainsi, l'infinité est, de son côté, déterminée comme le négatif de la finité et, par là, de la déterminité en général, comme le vide au-delà ; l'auto-suppression de celui-ci au sein du fini est un retour [hors] de la fuite vide, une *négation* de l'au-delà qui est, en lui-même, un *négatif*.[86]

Thèse spéculative *ontologique*, non subjective, il n'est pas évident qu'elle garantisse que *la raison* s'avance même d'un pas, ni qu'elle ait dû nécessairement naître au début pour regarder de haut les dinosaures et le dodo.

Il se peut qu'il s'agisse ici d'un *quiproquo*. Badiou admire le fait que Hegel n'ait pas peur d'affirmer contre Kant qu'on peut saisir et développer des vérités pleinement effectives. Mais, contrairement à Hegel, il rejette entièrement le transcendantalisme : il refuse de distinguer le niveau épistémique du niveau ontologique, ce qui découle de la décision de se tenir « à l'aphorisme de Parménide : "Le même, lui, est à la fois penser et être". »[87] Or, Hegel, dans les faits, distingue *deux instances différentes* de négativité-se-rapportant-à-soi. Celle, ontologique, qu'on vient d'analyser, et celle, subjective et transcendantale [88], introduite par l'allégorie du « seigneur et valet » dans la

[86] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 208. Les interpositions entre crochets dans nos citations de la *Logique* sont celles du traducteur.

[87] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 208.

[88] Que Hegel vise à radicaliser – plutôt qu'escamoter – le transcendantalisme kantien se maintient chez des commentateurs tels que Béatrice Longuenesse et Dionysias Christias, non seulement auprès de la lecture « non-métaphysique » associée à Robert Pippin. Il faut remarquer que pour Kant le « Je » transcendantal est tout d'abord « ce *Ça* (la chose) qui pense » *(Critique de la raison pure*, A346/B404, p. 363, 400*)*.

Phénoménologie de l'esprit, et dont les conditions ne se feront agencer dans la *Logique* qu'à partir de la *Doctrine de l'essence*, où il faut attendre la deuxième négation spécifique à l'apparition fugace de l'« être » fini. À travers cette négation particulière de la négation, l'être s'arrête de fuir en périssant dans l'instabilité. Ce n'est que là, rétroactivement, que sa disparition disparaît pour donner lieu à des stabilités permettant que des rapports logiques médiatisés y soient repérés et construits. Certes, on peut comprendre que Badiou souhaite discréditer et repousser toute notion que la première instance de négativité auto-supprimante, ontologique, peut *garantir* la floraison de la seconde, subjective[89]. En tout cas, cela n'épuise pas la motivation de son objection : l'étape suivante s'avérera plus épineuse.

II.

Badiou : non-être exclusif de la négativité

Quand Hegel passe au « quelque-chose » *quantitatif*, il se rend compte que la même procédure de déphasage du mauvais en bon ne peut pas se reproduire sans modification. Ce qui pose problème est que le quelque-chose quantitatif est *sans Autre*. Il y a une absence totale de médiatisation du négatif à l'intérieur des quanta, qui sont incessamment « le même » : *indifféremment* identique-à-soi *ainsi qu'*identique-à-l'autre. Ils sont indifférents à la différence qualitative-catégorielle. Le hiéroglyphe algébrique ou chiffre numérique, dans la logique de son *être*, est d'emblée dispersé en multiplicité extérieure-à-soi. Hegel écrit que « le quantum est lui-même ce qui est limité de telle sorte qu'il est ce qui est pour soi indifférent à l'égard de sa limite, par là à l'égard d'autres quanta et de son aller-au-delà [de lui-même]. »[90] Voyons la lecture (ensembliste) proposée par Badiou. Par exemple, dans la série des nombres premiers (2, 3, 5, … *n*) il n'y a pas de moment de déclic où la série pourrait consolider le hic inlassable d'une itération encore et toujours homogène en se révoltant contre un Autre qualitatif afin de se révéler et de s'affirmer comme qualitativement différente de n'importe quelle autre série arithmétique. Au sein de la juxtaposition « A A », ou auprès d'un carré dessiné à côté d'un autre carré lui ressemblant, les itérations sont à la fois quantitativement différentes, *et* fortement identiques. En ce qui concerne le nombre, « son in-différence est […] de faire proliférer

[89] On notera en passant que, dans le tome qui clôt sa trilogie systématique, *L'Immanence des vérités. L'Être et l'Événement, 3*, Paris, Fayard, 2018, p. 84-86, Badiou apporte des nuances à son portrait.

[90] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 346.

le même-que-soi en dehors de soi »[91]. Si, dans la série des nombres, il n'y a pas de plafond ou borne d'arrêt fixe dans la direction de l'infiniment grand – comme on voit dans les magnitudes d'infinis que sont les « Alephs » de Cantor – alors, également, « à l'intérieur, il reste extérieur : c'est l'infiniment petit »[92] : l'infinitésimal du calcul différentiel. « Le nombre, agencement de l'infinité quantitative, semble être universellement mauvais »[93].

Il faut souligner que Badiou ignore délibérément les évidences empiriques du comportement des lettres écrites à l'encre ou à la craie, et soutient que, dans leur fonctionnement mathématique – et *donc* dans leur *être* – elles ne sont que des Uns dévêtus, qui, pris comme tels, se tiennent à l'écart de toute re-présentation. De façon salutairement spéculative, les lettres se voient conçues, pour ainsi dire, en « tirets » qui se forment en se raturant elles-mêmes.[94] Elles sont *sans rapport*, donc prolifèrent sans arrêt.

Dans *L'Être et l'Événement*, « être-rien »[95] est le nom que Badiou donne à l'inconsistance pure, sa version de la négativité, une négativité qui est entièrement non-dialectique, non-déterminante : un néant total. Dans son propre édifice philosophique, il réserve au « non-être » le statut du « compte-pour-un »[96]. Il s'agit de l'opération qui permet que n'importe quel bout d'être, *quidditas* ou « tiret » – l'Un unifié quelconque – puisse se distinguer de l'être-rien et se présenter dans l'existence pour être nommé. L'« existence » se dit « être-en-présentation ». Il s'agit de ce qui est rendu *consistant*, selon un fonctionnement quasi-mathématique du terme « consistant », à savoir : identique-à-soi et non-contradictoire. Alors, cette opération, en tant qu'opération, ne peut pas être renforcée elle-même en élément-doté-d'être-en-présentation, faute d'une régression vicieuse. D'où son statut de *non-être*. L'« être », lorsqu'il se complexifie par la suite, ne se tisse donc que du nom du vide (ensembliste : « ∅ »), positivité non-relationnelle (« sans Autre ») non-hypostasié en objet : « un pur *nom propre*, qui

---

[91] A. Badiou, *ÊÉ*, p. 188.

[92] A. Badiou, *ÊÉ*, p. 189.

[93] A. Badiou, *ÊÉ*, p. 189.

[94] Cf. *ÊÉ*, p. 65-72, 79-83. « Tiret » et « rature » ne sont pas des termes propres à Badiou. Je les utilise seulement heuristiquement, en m'inspirant du livre de Rebecca Comay et Frank Ruda, *The Dash* [*Le Tiret* / *La Course*] – *The Other Side of Absolute Knowing*, Cambridge/London, MIT Press, 2018.

[95] A. Badiou, *ÊÉ*, p. 66.

[96] Cf. A. Badiou, *ÊÉ*, p. 31-39, 66.

s'indique lui-même, [et] ne donne aucun indice de différence dans ce à quoi il se réfère »[97]. Badiou forge ainsi l'arme d'« extériorité » non-catégorielle pour couper indifféremment la ligne de séparation entre infini et finitude. C'est un des outils avec lesquels il vise à satisfaire un projet qui précède *L'Être et l'Événement* et qui cherche à retrancher non seulement le pragmatisme docile, mais aussi ce qu'on pourrait appeler le « réductionnisme avare »[98]. Dès 1988, une extériorité non-catégorielle qui est indifférente à la différence nuit à l'évidence de n'importe quel « fait » ou critère de réussite, comme son angle mort *et* sa condition d'effectivité. L'indifférence déracine le donné de tout point de repère métaphysiquement fondateur ou explicatif.

Infini quantitatif, « bon » ou pas ?

Cette extériorité non-catégorielle lui permet de rejeter la « négativité intérieure », laquelle considère Badiou n'est rien d'autre, chez Hegel, qu'un moyen conservateur – et ultimement incohérent – pour essayer de « générer » les matériaux censés balayer les mêmes obstructions finies qui sont ses propres ingrédients : les déterminités *a posteriori* et le régime de classification fortuitement courant qui les fournit. Cela s'applique tout autant à la nature de l'infini selon la définition hégélienne.[99] Néanmoins, plutôt que de perdre espoir, Hegel s'y atèle sans hésitation et pense pouvoir mettre fin à la « mauvaiseté » impliquée par le manque d'Autre qualitatif qui passe par la prolifération des quanta. Il effectue ainsi le « bon infini quantitatif » qui met la quantité dans son propre rapport-à-soi – et lui permet de la montrer « pour-soi » – en la submergeant ou l'enveloppant dans une négativité coextensive au simple discernement de ce qu'elle n'est pas. Selon Hegel, le discernement de la qualité et de la quantité, en tant que quantité, se boucle lorsqu'on se rend compte que l'indifférence propre au nombre se trouve déterminée *comme indifférence* grâce à sa *différence* avec tout le royaume des différences. L'indifférence est qualitativement différente de la différence. Elle *nie* la différence, dans une négation déterminée : « parce que la déterminité quantitative est la différence seulement supprimée, le quantitatif est dans son être-hors-de-soi lui-même »[100].

---

[97] Cf. A. Badiou*, ÊÉ* p. 72. Cf. également p. 70.

[98] Cf. A. Badiou, *Le Concept de modèle*, Paris, Maspero, 1969, où parmi ses adversaires se trouvent le pragmatisme subtil de Quine et le physicalisme réducteur intra-scientifique de Carnap.

[99] Dans *L'Immanence des vérités* Badiou titre une sous-section « Une maxime : l'extériorité seule protège l'intériorité » (p. 86-87).

[100] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 347.

Inversement, c'est la différence qui nie la semblance d'indépendance auto-donatrice-d'intelligibilité qui appartenait à l'indifférence quantitative. De surcroît, aux yeux de Hegel, cette articulation dialectique est *elle-même* un moment dans l'effectuation du bon infini.

Badiou se moque de la solution de Hegel qui lui semble n'avoir fait de la quantité qu'une inconséquente méta-nomination de deuxième ordre :

> À mon sens, ça ne marche pas. Qu'est-ce qui ne marche pas ? C'est la nomination. Qu'il y ait une essence qualitative de la quantité, je le veux bien, mais pourquoi la nommer « infini » ? [...] Dans la prolifération numérique, il n'y a pas de vide car l'extérieur de l'Un *est* son intérieur, la pure loi qui fait se répandre le même-que-l'Un. La radicale absence d'autre, l'indifférence, illégitime ici qu'on déclare que l'essence du nombre fini, sa numéricité, est infinie.[101]

Ce qui découle des prémisses de Badiou en 1988 est que seule un *indécidable* est capable de forcer une pure décision et que seules les décisions pures arrivent à disjoindre du fini ce qu'il peut y avoir, dans la torsion de l'infini sur le fini, de *vrai*. Selon lui, il faut qu'une *extériorité purement extérieure* – dépourvue-de-sens et étrangère à l'altérité, inviolée du vide qualitatif – permette de griffonner le nom d'un imprévisible non-discernable dans un alphabet absolument indépendant. Une capacité de nomination librement indifférente à ce qu'elle nomme est exigée. Or, puisque les marques-quanta sont indifférentes à la différence, leur maniement *doit* être dicté – *a fortiori* dans l'ensemblisme axiomatisé ZF – « en extériorité », à travers des règles stipulées sans critère donné. Comme nous l'avons mentionné, la « thèse initiale » du livre de 1988 est que « les mathématiques *sont* l'ontologie »[102].

Cela explique en l'occurrence pourquoi, pour Badiou, le *seul* indécidable qui peut forcer une intervention décisionnelle en faveur de la vérité de l'actualité de l'infini est l'« hypothèse du continu » de Cantor. Ceci concerne l'écart non-dénombrable et hautement « proliférant » entre deux Alephs. L'hypothèse a été démontrée non-démontrable, et l'écart ordonnable seulement si l'on axiomatise l'indéterminé

[101] A. Badiou, *ÊÉ*, p. 189.

[102] A. Badiou, *ÊÉ*, p. 9-10.

incalculable. Nous affrontons néanmoins une circularité étonnante entre la « thèse initiale » et le traitement de l'infini. Badiou utilise les mathématiques quand il propose que ce soit l'anonymement indécidable – l'indéterminé incalculable – qui, à lui seul, force toute intervention arrivant à trancher les liens avec le fini. Mais décider que ce soit aux mathématiques qu'il faille se référer pour apprécier qu'une proposition de ce genre doive obligatoirement être faite est donc elle-même obligée par les mathématiques. La riposte de Badiou sera qu'il s'agit d'une circularité vertueusement cassée. Prendre ZF comme modèle – ou plutôt, inscription – de l'« être » est l'aboutissement de son raisonnement sur l'indifférence : sur l'anonyme indécidable, car indifférent. Que ZF, alphabet indifférent, soit censé interrompre la dialectique hégélienne est une conclusion atteinte d'une manière remarquablement dialectique. L'infini de Badiou se tient donc dans une « disjonction pure »[103]. À ses yeux, Hegel *perd* le non-vide, l'inerte Zéro qui disjoint la quantité de la qualité. Point qui dédouble celui sur le vide hégélien censé se révéler de la virtualité générative, et que je souhaite, pour conclure mon propos, remettre encore une fois en cause.

III.

Syntaxe sans sémantique et hasard

Inévitablement et plus ou moins ouvertement, Badiou a *ontologisé* la *positivité*. Vu que le « nom propre » du vide s'auto-discerne sans médiatisation supplémentaire, nous sommes obligés de conclure qu'il est identique-à-soi, ainsi il est clair que la *consistance* (positive) a été superposée à l'*être* (actuel et effectif). Les paroles agréablement noircies sur l'être-rien et le non-être ne font que confirmer que la négativité non-identique-à-soi a été *exclue* de la positivité : elle lui a été *opposée* et ensuite exclue.

Or, en ce qui concerne la mission de dépasser le contraint fini, il me semble que cette exclusion est le biais par lequel Badiou bloque le déploiement des déterminations catégorielles-qualitatives détenues dans les *ressources sémantiques langagières*, qu'elles soient quotidiennes ou spécialisées. C'est sur la positivité du tiret que Badiou s'appuie pour transformer toute *négativité active* en continuité usée, voire idéologiquement corrompue. Au fil de son argumentation, le fait de donner simplement *une raison* en langage naturel, qui motive qu'un certain choix est plus efficace afin de rompre avec les régimes faibles et courants, commence à lui sembler irrémédiablement *coincé dans l'étau*

[103] A. Badiou*, ÊÉ*, p. 190.

du rebattu. En reprenant l'exemple de la vigne, pour Badiou, les lois de la chimie ne peuvent pas *relever* sa variance capricieuse de vert en rouge, car la seule différence entre diversité et invariance est trop « intériorisante » et calfeutrée. Dans la science, comme ailleurs, Badiou croit que le seul moyen pour produire une nouveauté « générique » – séparatrice des contraintes courantes, et ainsi (dans un écho à Kant) spontanéiste[104] – est la *syntaxe* (mathématique, mais aussi de l'auto-prédication énonciative), capable de sélectionner sans critère donné des briques de construction, donc de les sélectionner de manière quasi-stochastique, ou plutôt, hyper-stochastique, c'est-à-dire explicitement vouées à une « suite infinie de rencontres hasardeuses »[105]. Mais le fait qu'il s'attache ainsi à esquiver les facticités sémantiques, ne serait-ce pas en grande partie parce que la déterminité sémantique s'avère être le domaine précisément où la négativité s'entrelace de façon conséquente avec la positivité ?

Hegel encore : la non-identité de l'identité, et vice versa

En effet, pour Hegel, l'identité-à-soi d'un alphabet de ratures qui se voudrait purement disjoint de la médiatisation dialectique n'est point sans présupposés métaphysiques – ces derniers sont à poser dans le gond où se retournent qualité en quantité, syntaxe en sémantique. La traversée entre ces polarités, par laquelle la spéculation passe de l'une à l'autre, se fait sans doute comme un claquement soudain, d'un coup sec, mais – ce qui est crucial – elle se fait *sans discontinuité* dans la concrétion mutuellement négatrice de leurs *Idées*. Le déplacement spéculatif, entre ces opposés apparemment simples, est un déphasage modal concernant la manière du fonctionnement logique de la détermination. En même temps, et du même coup, elle est un décalage de perspective transcendantale – à l'aune, spécifiquement, du mode de limitation : ou bien extérieurement stipulée, ou bien intérieurement articulée. Il ne s'agit pas d'une exclusion, mais plutôt d'une négation déterminée ; la stipulation manque d'intelligibilité dès qu'elle est séparée de l'articulation. Pareillement, le Positif, loin d'aplatir le Négatif à partir d'une indépendance hautaine, ne s'échappe lui-même de l'immédiat trompeur de la première négation – notamment celle de l'opposition – qu'en coïncidant avec, et « se réfléchissant » dans, son *Autre*, où *son* Autre est le Négatif. Il se peut que les mots ne soient que « la poussière sonore » de la voix[106]. Néanmoins, ce n'est qu'à travers eux

[104] Cf. A. Badiou, *ÊÉ*, p. 274, 280-281.

[105] *Ibid.*, p. 434.

[106] G. Lebrun, *La Patience du concept*, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

qu'on arrive à déterrer des présupposés cachés. Alors, même à l'entendement

> il suffit d'une simple considération pour voir, en premier lieu, que le Positif n'est pas un identique immédiat, mais en partie un opposé du Négatif et qu'il n'a de signification que dans ce rapport, donc que le Négatif même est inscrit dans son concept, – en partie, qu'il est en lui-même la négation se rapportant à soi du simple être-posé ou du Négatif, donc qu'il est lui-même la négation absolue en soi.[107]

L'identité-à-soi, telle à l'œuvre dans l'effectivité, ne *se génère* pas indépendamment, de façon *causa sui*, ni ne *se présente* d'elle-même d'une manière transparente dans l'intelligibilité. Le terme n'a son indépendance que dans la contradiction par laquelle il se supprime avec son opposé. Il s'agit du relâchement des vestiges de l'autorité législatrice simplement extérieure hérités de la métaphysique classique. Lebrun resserre encore la vis :

> Il en va de même pour le Négatif en-soi, quand on essaie de le penser dans sa spécificité « à l'encontre du Positif ». Il suffit d'expliciter la détermination qui le caractérise depuis Platon (« l'opposé en soi », « l'inégal en soi ») pour le faire se muer en ce que signifie son Autre. « Autre », « non-identique » par définition, il acquiert toutefois une nature à la faveur de cette définition même. Identique à soi *par le fait d'être toujours Autre*, il transgresse à son tour sa détermination initiale ; à son tour, il s'expulse de lui-même, puisqu'il ne demeure lui-même qu'en prenant la forme de l'« identité » que son rôle et d'exclure.[108]

Il n'y a pas d'échappatoire à la médiatisation, si c'est l'effectivité qui nous intéresse. Mais cela n'empêche que la poussière de la voix puisse se nommer indifféremment comme nom de tous les noms. Que l'immédiat soit intelligible comme tel

---

[107] G. W. F. Hegel, *Science de la logique. Deuxième livre – la doctrine de l'essence*. Cité par Lebrun, *La Patience du concept*, p. 292.

[108] G. Lebrun, *La Patience du concept*, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

grâce à sa distinction de son Autre, le médiatisé, ne veut pas dire qu'il soit par là « moins réel ». Si le fini *n'est pas vraiment*, il s'ensuit que les énoncés – en isolant des syllogismes qu'ils composent – sont des ordures cendreuses. Mais rappelons que, dialectiquement, l'aridité n'exclura pas forcément la fertilité[109]. Il n'est donc nul besoin que l'immédiateté irréfléchie d'une marque qui se nomme directement soit confondue avec une baignoire d'accouchement féerique. Mais je suggère que Badiou, en 1988, va trop loin dans l'autre sens, tel à éconduire comme fantasmatique tout contenu concret qui se distinguerait de la forme spartiate. L'infini, considéré comme *acte*, est également empreint de non-être. Il n'est pas une structure, ni l'opposé simple de la structure, et il ne laisse pas tranquille les contenus mais en *détruit* certains, en les relevant vers l'Absolu. Si mon argumentation fonctionne, la question se pose à l'égard de l'écartement de l'incomplétude finie en « disjonction pure » : n'épargnerait-il qu'un « *non*-fini »[110] ?

Nier l'immédiat du hasard

Certes, faute d'une négativité non-réflexive – positivement insoumise – à laquelle souder la cognition, nous restons coincés dans la première négation. Mais, en ce qui concerne l'infini, « actuel » ne veut pas dire « extérieurement *causa sui* qui se tient de lui-même et s'auto-dévoile à la pensée ». Conclusion qui, à la suite de l'intervention de Cantor, paraîtrait absurde si nous ne nous détachons pas, avec Hegel, de l'accoutumance aux derniers restes de la substantialité autosuffisante, en laissant entrer le non-être dans l'être. L'actualité, y compris cantorienne, de l'infini serait restée à jamais aux oubliettes, sans médiatisation cognitive – et ainsi n'aurait pu faire aucune différence effective *à la pensée* – ne serait-ce que grâce à la méta-boucle réflexive de la conscience-de-soi transcendantale. Que le Zéro se prédique de lui-même, permettant à la pensée (en principe) de s'arracher de sa soumission aux catégories et déterminables accidentellement courants, pour se lier à l'indifférence, soit – mais seulement en aval de l'opérativité de la prédication et de la nomination. Seule l'adhésion discutable à l'aphorisme de Parménide permet à ces fonctions de renvoyer et de répandre du transcendantal jusqu'au cœur de l'« être ».

Dans l'optique hégélienne, l'infinité est indifférente à la différence entre extérieur et intérieur, ainsi qu'à celle entre la différence qualitative et l'indifférence quantitative.

---

[109] Cf., A. Badiou, *L'Immanence des vérités*, p. 93-105. Hegel analyse le jugement « *l'esprit est un os* » contre le réductionnisme : le crâne est premièrement idée.

[110] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 200. Nous soulignons.

Tellement indifférente qu'elle est indifférente à sa propre indifférence. De ce point de vue, nonobstant leur gond spéculatif, il n'y a pas de synthèse possible de la quantité et de la qualité qui puisse faire que l'un bloque l'autre. L'« extériorité » véritablement effective – négatrice et productrice – n'est pas simple mais s'avère celle qui s'entrelace avec l'« intériorité » dans le tortillon du ruban. L'intérieur *est* l'extérieur, additionné de l'opacité et de la médiatisation épistémique.

Badiou a bien raison d'affirmer que la spontanéité de la pensée – mathématique ou non –, implique qu'il y a une partie d'aléatoire dans n'importe quelle décision. Mais le fait que les déterminités rencontrées ne peuvent pas nous dicter la conduite à suivre en ce qui les concerne n'empêche pas que l'on se cogne contre des indices qui peuvent nous servir à nier des obstructions réellement contraignantes. Si la procédure fidèle à l'infini se conçoit chez Badiou comme « hasardeuse, et *nullement* prédéterminée par le savoir »[111], il me semble que cette conception ne saurait se soutenir si le hasard n'a pas été superposé à un infini supposé se tenir par soi et en soi dans un « en dehors » des régimes de nécessité sémantiquement cartographiés dans la finitude, raccourci qui écrase toute médiatisation constitutive du « dedans » avec le « dehors ». En effet, on peut douter que la « contingence » garde un sens auprès de l'infini mathématique cantorien : n'est-elle pas un concept qualitatif-relationnel, voire dialectique ? À s'attaquer avec l'arme du hasard au culte faussement modeste de la finitude relativiste, Badiou ne tombe-t-il pas, en 1988 et en 2006, dans une proximité malheureuse avec un autre ennemi finitiste, celui de l'économie d'entreprise laissez-faire ? Après tout, ce sont Hayek et Friedman qui soutiennent que le monde est un amas aléatoire tellement déroutant qu'il faudrait abandonner l'idée de le comprendre et confier aux mécanismes du marché le réglage partiel du basculement des égoïsmes. Il est vrai que Badiou s'y attaque en démystifiant l'indéterminé à travers le modèle ensembliste. Mais, en donnant en réponse à la question « pourquoi y-a-t-il de la variance diverse de vert en rouge ? » qu'il n'y en a aucune raison et aucune cause, il risque de mystifier le déterminé. Réduire tout contenu catégoriel au stochastique, n'est-ce pas un arrêt qui aurait tendance à entraver la négation du donné fini, dans la mesure où il rend sa déterminité inintelligible ? Nous devrions plutôt affirmer que *l'explication hypothétique* a son rôle à jouer dans le dépassement du fini, à côté de la formalisation quasi-syntaxique et la construction autotélique.

La distinction entre invariance causale et spontanéité incalculable est qualitative.

[111] A. Badiou*, ÊÉ*, p. 371. Nous soulignons.

Mais cela n'implique pas que la spontanéité s'aplatisse lorsque l'on pose des lois chimiques pour rendre compte du caprice apparent des couleurs. La raison s'efforce plutôt de comprendre les *contradictions* qu'elle trouve au niveau de l'entendement, c'est-à-dire de la représentation, et ceci afin de rouvrir, plutôt que clore, la voie qui mènera à de *nouvelles* contradictions. L'« être » est supprimé dans l'essence, mais il y a un reste qui demeure, et celui-ci est précisément le *Schein*, son clignotement en identité avec le non-être. La possibilité d'avoir tort implique des *devoir-êtres* et des *devoir-faires*[112] qui ne se réduisent à aucun fait positivement brut. Le défi légué par Hegel semblerait donc concerner l'articulation de la différence qualitative comme telle dans sa facticité non seulement avec le nominalisme, comme le laisse entendre Badiou malgré son rejet, mais aussi par une conception spéculative et transcendantale de la causalité comme *forme de médiatisation*. Comme l'a remarqué Sellars, « [l]a devise de l'âge de la science pourrait bien être : *les philosophes de la nature jusqu'ici ont voulu comprendre les "sens" ; la tâche c'est de les transformer*. »[113]

Eii. Sommaire de la Section IV

Cette Section finale met au travail les ressources sellarso-hégéliennes préalablement élaborées afin de poser la question de l'autodépassement au sein de la connaissance, avec pour but de déterminer si une notion nuancée de « progrès » peut ou non être arrachée aux griffes de la suspicion d'être irrémédiablement corrompu par une historiographie « whig », néfaste car sournoisement autoritaire.

Le Chapitre 7 étudie la proposition de Sellars d'une « métaphysique des purs procès », se focalisant sur la déclaration faite par le philosophe selon laquelle les rapports temporels, tel qu'ils nous apparaissent, ne sont pas métaphysiquement réels. Nous y défendons la thèse selon laquelle il faut éviter d'exprimer le temps comme une *substance*. Bien plutôt, chaque registre temporel distinct doit se concevoir comme l'effet inhérent

---

[112] Nous traduisons les néologismes anglais de Wilfrid Sellars, *ought-to-bes* et *ought-to-dos*. Cf. Wilfrid Sellars, « Language as Thought and as Communication », *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 29 (4), 1969, p. 506-527.

[113] W. Sellars, « Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities », dans Herbert Feigl, Michael Scriven & Grover Maxwell (dir.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Volume II*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1958, p. 225-308, p. 288.

d'une *forme de médiatisation*. En conséquence, il y a une temporalité – un temps – propre à la connaissance et au savoir, un temps qui est irréductible et qui peut se dire *autonome*. Néanmoins, nos facultés sont *finies*, et donc apprendre (c'est-à-dire, bâtir les contenus de la connaissance), est une activité vouée au manque, et à l'attente, qui sont inhérents à la temporalité *successive*. Hegel rend envisageable de poser une identité-de-la-dernière-instance *contradictoire* de cette temporalité avec celle, non-successive ou non-séquentielle, qui est appropriée à l'échelle métaphysique (et non plus à l'échelle épistémique) : une temporalité quelque peu héraclitéenne que Sellars nomme le « venir-à-être et cesser-d'être absolu ». Nous nous mettons en cela d'accord avec Jules Vuillemin (selon un propos de 1954) déclarant que, en tout état de cause, il faut impérativement rejeter toute métaphysique qui écraserait l'autonomie (relative) du connaître et de l'apprentissage. Si nous nous inspirons tacitement ici des propos de Bachelard, d'Althusser, et de Badiou, et si par la même occasion nous continuons de puiser de quoi réaliser cette inspiration *chez Hegel*, il faut déclarer que nous jugeons le rejet (sévère et total) d'Hegel par ces penseurs péremptoire, voire nocif aux fins salutaires poursuives par ses penseurs mêmes. Ainsi, une discussion explicite du cas de Bachelard se déroule dans le Chapitre 8, dans la sous-section intitulée « La dialectique du *dedans* et *dehors* et le cadre structural de l'*enveloppement* ».

Le Chapitre 8 s'attache à proposer une approche de l'historiographie des sciences de la nature et de celle des mathématiques qui serait d'emblée dialectique sans manquer d'être en même temps d'emblée matérialiste, dans le sens du terme que l'on trouve au sein du « matérialisme historique » de Marx et Engels. Le slogan du Chapitre, un Chapitre qui est décisif pour l'étude pris comme un tout, pourrait être que, s'il faut que le matérialisme – pour échapper à la vulgarité et la naïveté – soit *idéaliste*, alors en retour il faut que l'idéalisme – afin de ne pas tomber grossièrement dans le faux – soit matérialiste.

L'holisme de W. V. O. Quine – un holisme à la fois épistémique et ontologique – nous sert de point de départ. Des applaudissements enthousiastes sont consacrés au principe de Quine de la *sous-détermination* de la construction des théories scientifiques par tout indice empirique observable, un principe qui lui permet de se dérober aux leurres les plus frustes de ce qu'Imre Lakatos appelle le « falsificationnisme naïf ». Nous avons affaire là à ce que Lakatos a nommé la « thèse Duhem-Quine » (se référant à l'ancêtre philosophique de Quine, qu'il cite lui-même, Pierre Duhem). Quine écrit :

> La totalité de ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler notre savoir ou nos croyances, des faits les plus anecdotiques de l'histoire et de la

> géographie aux lois les plus profondes de la physique atomique, ou même des mathématiques pures et de la logique, est une étoffe tissée par l'homme, et dont le contact avec l'expérience ne se fait qu'en bordure. Ou encore, pour changer d'image, la science totale est comparable à un champ de forces, dont les conditions limites seraient l'expérience. Si un conflit avec l'expérience intervient à la périphérie, des réajustements s'opèrent à l'intérieur du champ.[114]
>
> Mais le champ total est tellement sous-déterminé par ses conditions limites, à savoir l'expérience, qu'on a toute latitude pour choisir les énoncés qu'on veut réévaluer, au cas où interviendrait une seule expérience contraire. Aucune expérience particulière n'est, en tant que telle, liée à un énoncé particulier situé à l'intérieur du champ, si ce n'est indirectement, à travers des considérations d'équilibre concernant le champ pris comme un tout.[115]
>
> On peut toujours maintenir la vérité de n'importe quel énoncé, quelles que soient les circonstances. Il suffit d'effectuer des réajustements radicaux dans d'autres régions du système. On peut, même, en cas d'expérience récalcitrante, préserver la vérité d'un énoncé situé tout près de la périphérie, en alléguant une hallucination, ou en modifiant certains des énoncés qu'on appelle lois logiques.[116]

Dans une certaine mesure, les résonances avec la critique du Mythe du Donné sont plus que bienvenues. Cependant, nous trouvons une faute grave dans le discours de Quine – qui tient au double but d'élaborer une définition de la scientificité propre aux sciences de la nature et d'identifier un critère de réussite leur convenant –, faute qui se loge dans les notions d'« utilité » et de *prédiction* : « Étant empiriste, je continue à

[114] Willard Van Orman Quine, « Deux dogmes de l'empirisme », dans W. V. O. Quine, *Du point de vue logique. Neuf essais logico-philosophiques*, dir. Sandra Laugier, traduit sous la direction de Sandra Laugier, Paris, Vrin, 2003 [1953], p. 49-81, p. 76-77.

[115] *Ibid*., p. 77.

[116] *Ibid*., p. 77.

concevoir, en dernière instance, le schème conceptuel de la science comme un instrument, destiné à prédire l'expérience future à la lumière de l'expérience passée. »[117] Ainsi Quine retombe précisément dans le Mythe du Donné, parce que ce que l'on arrive à prédire est *formé* par ses théories, lorsque le *besoin* de prédire quoi que ce soit est surdéterminé par l'exigence basse, strictement contingente, de la survie. En voulant soutenir la Vérité et l'indépendance de la science, Quine les perd aux coups de poings de la bagarre néo-darwinienne. Qui plus est, une critique lancée par Sellars dans ses écrits édités et dans un échange de lettres montre que Quine *positivise* et *substantialise* subrepticement les *entités abstraites*.

Lakatos quant à lui offre un « falsificationnisme sophistiqué » qui de prime abord a l'air d'éviter cet embarras. L'efficacité *utilitaire* ne le satisfait guère : « la notion vague de "simplicité" selon Duhem fait de la décision surtout une affaire de goût et de mode. »[118] La question qui tranche dans le vif est d'établir comment identifier une proposition théorique qui échoue, qui *a tort*. Que signifie *être dans le faux* dans les sciences de la nature ?

> Le problème ne consiste donc *pas* à savoir quand nous devons nous en tenir à une « *théorie* » en face de « *faits connus* » et quand il faut procéder à l'inverse. Ce n'est *pas* de savoir que faire quand des « théories » entrent en contradiction avec des « faits ». [...] Qu'une proposition soit un « *fait* » ou une « *théorie* » dans le contexte d'une mise à l'épreuve dépend de notre décision méthodologique. [...] [L]a contradiction ne se situe pas « entre des théories et des faits », mais entre deux théories de haut niveau : une *théorie interprétative* qui fournit les faits et une *théorie explicative* qui les explique [...] Il ne faut plus poser le problème en se demandant s'il s'agit ou non d'une véritable « *réfutation* » : il consiste à corriger une *incompatibilité* entre la « théorie explicative » mise à l'épreuve et les théories « interprétatives »

[117] *Ibid*., p. 79.

[118] Imre Lakatos, « La falsification et la méthodologie des programmes de recherche scientifique » dans I. Lakatos, *Histoire et Méthodologie des sciences. Programmes de recherches et reconstruction rationnelle*, dir. Luce Girard, tr. Catherine Malamoud & Jean-Fabien Spitz, Paris, PUF, 1994 [1970], p. 1-146, p. 40.

> explicites ou cachées ; ou, si l'on veut, *le problème est de savoir quelle théorie considérer comme l'interprétative qui fournit les faits « durs » et laquelle est l'explicative qui « tente » de les expliquer*. [...]
>
> Cet argument à lui seul suffirait à montrer que la conclusion que nous avions tirée précédemment d'un autre argument est correcte : à savoir que les expérimentations ne renversent pas simplement les théories, qu'aucune théorie n'interdit un état de choses spécifiables par avance. Ce n'est pas que nous proposons une théorie et que la Nature peut crier NON, mais plutôt que nous proposons un labyrinthe de théories et que la Nature peut crier INCOMPATIBLES.[119]
>
> Le falsificationnisme sophistiqué déplace ainsi le problème : au lieu d'évaluer des *théories*, il évalue des *séries de théories*, qui seulement peuvent être dites scientifiques ou non scientifiques ; appliquer l'épithète de « scientifique » à une unique théorie est une erreur de catégorie.
>
> Le critère adopté de tout temps pour considérer qu'une théorie est satisfaisante est qu'elle s'accorde avec les faits observés. Pour une série de théories, notre critère empirique est qu'elle doit produire des faits nouveaux.[120]

La science doit *produire des faits nouveaux*. L'indice à exploiter dans la mission de cette production est l'incompatibilité logique. Chez Lakatos il y a un impératif de dépassement fort, car l'exigence de nouveauté doit être Absolue, non-relativisable. Sinon, l'inconstance du goût envahirait et détruirait toute vérité qui se voudrait capable de rompre avec la seule opinion partielle. Il y donc une absoluité de la novation accouchée de l'imagination créatrice. Cette créativité frappe là où se trouve le levier de l'incompatibilité.

[119] *Ibid*., p. 57-58 ; traduction modifiée.

[120] *Ibid*., p. 42-43.

> Le tenant du falsificationnisme sophistiqué autorise le remplacement de n'importe quelle partie du corps de la science, *mais* uniquement à la condition qu'elle soit remplacée d'une façon « progressive », de sorte que le remplacement prédise, avec succès, des faits inédits. [...] En science, la direction n'est pas déterminée par l'univers de faits qui nous environne, mais essentiellement par l'imagination créatrice des hommes. Celle-ci trouvera vraisemblablement des éléments de preuve inédits pour corroborer même le programme le plus « absurde », si elle les cherche avec assez d'énergie. [...]
>
> Le tenant du falsificationnisme *dogmatique* lèvera les bras au ciel, horrifié par cette méthode. Il verra le spectre de l'instrumentalisme de Bellarmin se lever au milieu des décombres sous lesquels le succès newtonien de la « science prouvée » l'avait enseveli. Il accusera le falsificationnisme sophistiqué d'édifier des systèmes de cases arbitraires [*of building arbitrary Procrustean pigeon hole systems*] et comme Procuste de faire entrer de force les faits dans ces cases. Il peut même le stigmatiser comme un renouveau de l'alliance irrationnelle et impie du pragmatisme grossier de James avec le volontarisme de Bergson dont avaient triomphé Russel et Stebbing. Mais notre tenant du falsificationnisme sophistiqué combine l'« instrumentalisme » (ou le « conventionnalisme ») avec une exigence fortement empiriste (que n'ont appréciée ni les médiévaux soucieux de « sauver les phénomènes » tels que Bellarmin, ni les pragmatistes comme Quine, ni les bergsoniens comme Le Roy) : l'exigence de Leibniz-Whewell-Popper, que la construction – bien conçue – de cases [*pigeon holes*] doit avancer beaucoup plus vite que le relevé des faits à y ranger.[121]

Ce qui attise le feu de la production des théories insolites, c'est la bataille qui fait rage entre les programmes de recherches, autour de la concurrence pour les leviers d'incompatibilité. Certes, Lakatos a bien raison d'adopter le langage hégélien afin

[121] *Ibid*., p. 142-144.

d'insister que cette bataille doit faire rage de manière étendue et conséquente, et même éventuellement de manière très confuse et maladroite, *bien avant* qu'une des théories lancées dans le ring de boxe ne parvienne enfin à se corroborer par le biais d'une observation empirique. Il affirme ainsi que « la rationalité opère beaucoup plus lentement que ne le pensent la plupart des gens et que, même ainsi, elle est faillible. La chouette de Minerve vole à la tombée de la nuit. »[122] Cependant, nous affirmons que cette stratégie pour la réalisation d'un impératif à dépasser qui serait, comme impératif, absolutisable, risque gravement de retomber sur le présupposé d'une transparence positive entre la nature et la pensée, dans la mesure exacte où elle risque de fétichiser *la production (abstraite) elle-même*, voire à conclure tacitement que *le progrès pourrait être quantifiable*. Nous argumentons que celle-ci est l'erreur même qui mène à la déclaration suivante, d'une teneur réactionnaire rébarbative :

> elle [« l'exigence de croissance continue »] montre l'insuffisance de programmes tels que le marxisme ou la psychanalyse freudienne, qui sont certes « unifiés » et présente les grandes lignes du type de théories auxiliaires qu'ils vont utiliser pour absorber les anomalies, mais qui inventent, à tout coup, leurs véritables théories auxiliaires en réponse aux faits et sans, en même temps, en prédire de nouveaux. (Quel fait *inédit* le marxisme a-t-il prédit depuis 1917 ?)[123]

À l'encontre de Lakatos, le marxisme et le freudisme ne portent point sur *ce qui est* mais plutôt, respectivement, sur *ce qui devrait être* et sur *ce qui ne devrait pas être*, et – comme Lakatos, en bon post-hégélien (participant au séminaire de Georg Lukács en Hongrie dans l'après-guerre) devait très bien le comprendre, ces théories *ne portent point directement sur la nature positive* mais plutôt sur les effets qui adviennent dès lors que la connaissance commence à se connaître elle-même – c'est-à-dire, dès lors qu'elle devient ce que Hegel appelle *Geist* (Esprit), et Marx *Gattungswesen* (« essence générique ») – ainsi que sur les conditions, emmêlées dans la socialité, de cette conscience-de-soi.

---

[122] *Ibid*., p. 124. Cela étant dit, Lakatos traîne les pieds de façon inquiétante à admettre que la corroboration par observation empirique *pourrait ne jamais arriver*, ce qui est le cas par exemple pour la théorie des cordes dans la physique fondamentale.

[123] *Ibid*., p. 126.

Essayant de puiser de manière critique et avertie dans l'hégélianisme qui chez Lakatos ne se déploie que par intermittence, nous concluons qu'il échoue en fin de compte à se doter d'une conceptualisation suffisante de la nature. Lakatos finit en considérant comme acquise une capacité créatrice de l'ordre d'un automate, et il la superpose à la nature, tout en s'arrogeant un morceau (de trop) de transparence épistémique pour l'attribuer à cette nature. Malgré lui, il risque de s'appuyer sur une efflorescence cybernétique ou émanation spinoziste, arbitrairement assurée de pénétrer le savoir à partir de la nature, *tout en étant extérieure – ce qui est peu dialectique – à ce savoir*.[124] Mais nous proposons que *la nature est indifférente à la production*, ainsi que totalement opaque sauf à travers la médiation du rapport-à-soi de l'« Esprit ». Si l'Esprit s'identifie comme étant le domaine dans lequel l'hétéronomie et l'autonomie peuvent s'entrelacer (au moins *in potentia*), alors la nature est le domaine de l'*hétéronomie absolue*. « C'est l'*impuissance* de la nature [*die Ohnmacht der Natur*], que de ne conserver qu'abstraitement les déterminations conceptuelles et d'exposer la réalisation du particulier à une déterminabilité extérieure »[125]… des brins d'herbe pliés par la brise sans être poussés par leur propre spontanéité : des extériorités s'imposant à des extériorités. Mais où déceler la différence sinon auprès d'un *Gattungswesen* qui se-rapporte-à-soi en se posant la question ? Nous voyons que le terme « *production* » est ici fautif, ainsi que l'est l'idée que des « faits » sont toujours des desiderata. La quête chez Lakatos d'un impératif de dépassement non-relatif, n'est-elle pas mieux servie si l'on saute le pas en disant que c'est *la négativité se rapportant à soi* qui elle seule peut tenir le coup ? Il y a des incompatibilités logiques triviales, et il y en a d'*irréversibles*, d'*infranchissables*

---

[124] Marx lui-même s'attaque à ce genre d'erreur (nous soulignons ; « ** » signifie « en anglais dans l'original ») :

> [L]a totalité concrète [*Totalität*] en tant que totalité de pensée [*Gendakentotalität*], en tant que concret de pensée [*Gedankenconcretum*], est *en fait*** un produit de l'acte de penser, de concevoir ; ce n'est, par contre, nullement le produit du concept *qui s'engendrerait lui-même et penserait en dehors et au-dessus de l'intuition [Anschauung] et de la représentation [Vorstellung],* mais celui de l'élaboration [*Verarbeitung*] qui transforme en concepts l'intuition et la représentation. (Karl Marx, *Manuscrits de 1857-1858 dits « Grundrisse »*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 2011, p. 58.)

[125] G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophie de la nature*, tr. Bernard Bourgeois, Paris, Vrin, 2004 [1830], p. 190.

(même si seulement provisoirement infranchissables). Que l'incompatibilité comporte déjà en elle ce genre de différence, l'hégélien dira que c'est grâce au caractère purement auto-négatrice de l'*Idée* elle-même comme telle. D'où le fait qu'il y a *encore moins* de besoin de faire des génuflexions aux extériorités-simplement-extérieures que Lakatos n'a pas constaté dans l'article que nous avons étudié.

D'où également le fait que la *vérité* d'une théorie *doit* se concevoir en *torsion*, s'agissant de la pression *qualitative* imposée là où une incompatibilité logique – une *contradiction* – montre que quelque chose *devrait* changer, même si, de fait, rien ne change (ce concept de « torsion » se trouvant dans la lecture d'Hegel offerte par Jean Hyppolite, ainsi que dans celle offerte par Badiou aux alentours de 1979). Et d'où de surcroît que l'étude ici résumée s'intéresse au temps et aux temporalités, car le fétichisme de la *production abstraite* se réduit à certains égards au fait de se laisser tyranniser par une conception bien trop linéaire et continue d'un *avenir* de « croissance » *quantifiable*.

Afin de dénicher plus concrètement une stratégie qui permettrait de franchir la *fétichisation* de la nouveauté, nous passons en revue la théorie d'« imagement » de Sellars, (*picturing* ; un projet qui s'inspire, de manière *critique*, de Wittgenstein), de sa sémantique de rôles fonctionnels, et de son nominalisme « métalinguistique ». Ces élaborations techniques désubstantialisent la sémantique ainsi que la syntaxe ; selon nous, leur portée – d'un intérêt assez grand – sera qu'ils ont pour conséquence un *réalisme de l'acte du connaître* qui retient l'opacité de cet acte à lui-même. Quelle crainte éprouve-t-on face aux rapports métaphysiquement postulés par certains philosophes comme contraignants dès lors que l'on se rend compte que ces postulats sont tissés du non-être de l'étoffe de l'« entre-deux », du « ni-l'un-ni-l'autre » non-substantiel qui est la « matière » de toute erreur, ainsi que de toute vérité ? Par exemple :

> Socrate exemplifie la sagesse
>
> n'affirme aucun *rapport* [métaphysico-ontologique] entre Socrate et la sagesse, car le *Socrate* fonctionne en tant qu'expression métalinguistique dans le mode matériel de la parole. Ainsi le « rapport » d'exemplification qui lie pour les Platoniciens [vulgaires] le domaine du devenir au domaine de l'être, et qui lie pour les réalistes plus modérés l'ordre « réel » à l'ordre « logique » ou « conceptuel », est un rejeton du « rapport » du vrai, dont

> l'analyse en finit par montrer qu'il n'y a aucun rapport, mais un signe *qu'il y a quelque chose à faire*.[126]

Ou également :

> [A]u lieu de signifier un rapport ou propriété relationnelle de déclarations (ou, d'ailleurs, de pensées), « vrai » est plutôt un signe *qu'on se confronte à quelque chose qu'il faudrait qu'on fasse* – car inférer, c'est un agir.[127]

Nous nous emparons de cette occasion de nous adresser au problème du *devoir-être* en faisant appel à Nietzsche (comme détaillé plus haut dans l'ébauche donnée dans la partie C de ce résumé). Notre suggestion d'une piste de solution poursuit la possibilité d'une articulation, dans un chiasme dialectique, de l'optimisme rationaliste et du pessimisme fataliste.

La liaison nécessaire du *devoir-être* avec l'*erreur* oblige une discussion de la problématique de la *représentation*, problématique que le poststructuralisme a rejetée comme banale en concluant que, fixer une ligne jaune (de manière corrigible et se corrigeant d'elle-même) entre une représentation vraie et une représentation fausse, implique le vœu pieux, et patibulaire, de s'échapper du mimétisme en s'arrogeant subrepticement un modèle transcendant, Mythiquement Donné (vulgaire-platonicien). Nous estimons, suite à une lecture de *La philosophie du non* (1940) et du *Poétique de l'espace* (1957) de Gaston Bachelard que, *si* la *négativité de la décision* se fait prévaloir comme créative (au moins *in potentia*) de manière imprévisible et non-linéaire, alors, le rejet de la représentation pourrait très bien se démasquer comme victime d'un chantage étriqué. Si représenter *est un agir*, et si l'on reconnaît l'effectivité de l'illusion (du non-être), alors, la fixation de la ligne jaune se révèle comme une *modalité adverbiale de l'agir*, et l'accusation d'avoir voulu dédaigneusement laisser en arrière le mimétisme aura l'air moins persuasive.

---

[126] W. Sellars, 'Abstract Entities', *Review of Metaphysics* 16:4, 1963, p. 627-671, p. 669. Nos interpositions et notre emphase.

[127] Sellars, 'Truth and "Correspondence"', dans W. Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality*, Atascadero, Ridgeview, 1991 [1963], p. 195-222, p. 204.

> Si le terme « sentir » s'emploie pour la *conscience* d'une entité sensible *comme ayant* un certain caractère sensible, alors ce terme ne doit pas être utilisé aussi pour l'état générique qui se tient par rapport à « bleument » de la même façon que « danser » se tient par rapport à « valsement ».[128]

Afin d'articuler la question de la torsion avec la question de la temporalité historique nous nous tournons ensuite vers Marx et Engels. Il s'agit de critiquer ce que l'on pourrait nommer, à la limite, le « Mythe du Donné Historique ». Non seulement parmi les « critiques généalogiques » celles qui tombent dans une posture mesquine pourraient devenir les cibles du rasoir de la doctrine du matérialisme historique, si cette doctrine est saisie comme continuatrice – en même temps qu'interrogatrice – d'Hegel. Qui plus est, le manque de transparence entre le « maintenant » et le « jadis » entraîne l'impossibilité de sortir du présent historique pour atteindre un survol des époques passées qui ferait que les périodes historiques s'alignent pour être comparées les unes aux autres dans une extériorité de juxtaposition mutuelle.

> L'anatomie de l'homme est une clef pour l'anatomie du singe. Les signes annonciateurs d'une forme supérieure dans les espèces animales d'ordre inférieur ne peuvent pour autant être compris que lorsque la forme supérieure est elle-même déjà connue. Ainsi l'économie bourgeoise nous donne la clef de l'économie antique, etc. Mais nullement à la manière des économistes qui effacent toutes les différences historiques et voient dans toutes les formes de sociétés celles de la société bourgeoise. On peut comprendre le tribut, la dîme, etc., quand on connaît la rente foncière. Mais il ne faut pas les identifier.[129]

---

[128] W. Sellars, FMPP, I, §157.

[129] K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 62. Le passage continue (non-cité dans *WW* ; l'interposition est celle des traducteurs dans un note de bas de page) :

> Comme de plus la société bourgeoise n'est elle-même qu'une forme contradictoire de développement, il est des rapports appartenant à des formes de sociétés antérieures que l'on pourra ne rencontrer en elle que tout à fait étiolés,

Il faut reconnaître la pertinence *d'un certain point de vue* de l'*incommensurabilité* telle qu'elle est traitée par Thomas Kuhn (sans d'incommensurabilités, il n'y aurait plus d'indices que sont les anomalies). Cependant, nous jugeons que Kuhn néglige les *différences qualitatives* qui se décèlent au sein des incompatibilités logiques (fussent-elles incommensurables) qui sont discernables dans le « maintenant » historique. Il nous semble qu'Hegel marque un sommet dans la pensée de cette sorte de différence :

> [L]a raison *pensante* aiguise, pour ainsi dire, la différence émoussée du divers, la simple variété de la représentation, en différence *essentielle*, en *opposition*. Les [termes] variés, poussés au point-extrême de la contradiction, deviennent seulement alors mobiles et vivants l'un en regard de l'autre et reçoivent en elle la négativité, laquelle est la pulsation immanente et l'automouvement et vitalité.[130]

> [I]l n'y a pour soi encore, pour ainsi dire, aucun dommage, manque ou défaut à une Chose quand en elle on peut mettre en évidence une contradiction. Bien plutôt toute détermination, tout concret, tout concept est essentiellement une unité de moments différents et différenciables qui passent, par la *différence déterminée*, *essentielle*, en [moments] contradictoires.[131]

---

ou même travestis. Par exemple, la propriété communale. Si donc il est vrai que les catégories de l'économie bourgeoise possèdent une certaine vérité valable pour toutes les autres formes de société, cela ne peut être admis que *cum grano salis* ["Littéralement : « avec un grain de sel », c'est-à-dire « avec des réserves critiques », « en un sens bien précis »."] Elles peuvent receler ces formes développées, étiolées, caricaturées, etc. mais toujours avec une différence essentielle.

« Différence essentielle » : une tournure carrément post-hégélienne.

[130] G. W. F. Hegel, *Science de la logique. Deuxième livre – la doctrine de l'essence*, tr. Gwendoline Jarczyk et Pierre-Jean Labarrière, Paris, Kimé, 2010, p. 69.

[131] *Ibid*., p. 70.

Afin de concrétiser notre argument nous lisons un article d'Alexandre Koyré de 1955, « De l'influence des conceptions philosophiques sur l'évolution des théories scientifiques ». Il nous faut une historiographie qui thématise de plein fouet la *contradiction conceptuelle antagonique*. Prétendre qu'un « paradigme » a été laissé en arrière dans un désuétude finale n'est pas forcément l'acmé de la radicalité, mais, au contraire, risque de comprendre de travers – et donc de prendre à revers - le dépassement lui-même. Car ce dernier (suggérons-nous) consiste à créer de nouvelles irréversibilités logiques lesquelles ont la forme de torsions *relationnelles*, non pas *atomiques et isolées*, ni non plus *mono-théoriques*.

> La révolution du XVIIe siècle, que j'ai appelée jadis « la revanche de Platon » a été, en fait, l'effet d'une alliance. De celle de Platon avec Démocrite. Étrange alliance. Ma foi, cela arrive dans l'histoire que le Grand Turc s'allie avec le Roi Très Chrétien, – les ennemis de nos ennemis sont nos amis – ou, pour revenir à l'histoire de la pensée philosophico-scientifique, quoi de plus étrange que l'alliance, plus récente, entre Einstein et Mach ?
>
> Des atomes démocritéens dans l'espace de Platon – ou d'Euclide – : on comprend bien que Newton ait eu besoin d'un Dieu pour maintenir la liaison entre les éléments constitutifs de son Univers. On comprend bien aussi le caractère étrange de cet Univers – du moins, *nous le* comprenons bien : le XIXe siècle était trop habitué à lui pour en voir toute l'étrangeté – dont les éléments matériels, objets d'une extrapolation théorique, baignent, *sans en être affectés*, dans le non-être nécessaire et éternel, objet d'une connaissance *a priori*, de l'espace absolu.[132]

Nonobstant les métaphores d'alliances entre rois, et de dirigeants militaires, les combattants dans le ring de boxe sont bel et bien des *concepts*, non pas des *gens*. Et le levier de la contradiction se trouve au sein *d'un seul programme de recherche* tout aussi bien qu'entre des théories différentes.

[132] Alexandre Koyré, « De l'influence des conceptions philosophiques sur l'évolution des théories scientifiques », 1954. Détails du recueil indisponibles, exceptée la numérotation de l'article : p. 239-240.

Les conceptions cosmologiques et physiques d'Aristote ont, généralement parlant, une très mauvaise presse.

Que ne s'est-on pas moqué d'Aristote pour avoir assigné au monde des dimensions déterminées, pour avoir pensé que les corps pouvaient se mouvoir sans être tirés ou poussés par des forces extérieures, pour sa croyance que le mouvement circulaire était un mouvement d'une espèce particulièrement importante, et de l'avoir appelé un mouvement naturel !

Nous savons aujourd'hui – mais nous ne l'avons pas encore *accepté* et *admis* – que tout cela n'était, peut-être, pas tellement ridicule, et qu'Aristote avait bien davantage raison qu'il ne le savait lui-même. Après tout, le mouvement circulaire paraît effectivement être particulièrement répandu dans le monde, et particulièrement important ; tout tourne et gyre, à ce qui semble, les galaxies et les nébuleuses, les astres, les soleils et les planètes, les atomes et les électrons… les photons eux-mêmes paraissent ne pas faire exception à la règle.

Quant au mouvement spontané des corps – nous savons bien depuis Einstein qu'une courbure locale de l'espace peut bien produire des mouvements de ce genre ; nous savons également, ou croyons savoir, que notre Univers n'est nullement infini – bien qu'il n'ait pas de limites, contrairement à ce que croyait Aristote – et qu'en dehors de cet Univers il n'y a rigoureusement rien, justement parce qu'il n'y a pas de « dehors » et que tout l'espace est « dedans ».

C'est précisément ce que nous disait Aristote qui, n'ayant pas à sa disposition les ressources de la géométrie riemannienne, se bornait à affirmer qu'en dehors du monde il n'y avait *rien*, ni *plein*, ni *vide*, et que tous les *lieux*, c'est-à-dire, *tout l'espace*, *étaient à l'intérieur*, ou dedans.

La conception aristotélicienne n'est pas une conception mathématique – c'est là sa faiblesse ; c'est là, aussi, sa force – : c'est une conception métaphysique. Le monde d'Aristote n'est pas un

> monde possédant une courbure géométrique ; il est, si l'on peut dire, métaphysiquement courbé.[133]

L'hégélien dira que l'irréversibilité logique établie par Einstein entre les *lieux* aristotéliciens et l'exigence galiléenne de mathématisation est néanmoins *complète* plutôt qu'incomplète : elle est équilibrée et réfléchie-en-soi plutôt que boiteuse, unilatérale, ou en manque de quelque chose qu'elle devrait posséder. Elle s'inscrit dans l'*Idée Absolue*. L'impératif de dépasser se volatilise-t-il, alors ? Non, puisque – *contre Hegel lui-même* – l'Absolu ne fait rien *pour* les penseurs finis ni rien *pour lui-même* ; plutôt, seuls les êtres pensants peuvent le construire et découvrir, *laborieusement*. (Dans un sens on peut dire alors que ce qui est absolu et atemporel – éternel – est donc *inutile*.) Il n'y a pas de pensée sans un assujettissement de-la-première-instance bassement hétéronome. De surcroît, on peut douter du fait qu'il puisse y avoir une pensée sans que l'hétéronomie (ainsi *doublement* « étrangée ») de ce que la pratique a produit dans son propre dos traîne lourdement au cœur de l'idéalité ; c'est-à-dire, sans l'illusion de la séparation métaphysiquement substantielle. Marx et Engels écrivent :

> La division de travail ne devient effectivement division qu'à partir du moment où s'opère une division de travail matériel et intellectuel. [Note de bas de page de l'éditrice : « {Remarque marginale de Marx :} Première forme des idéologues, *prêtres*, coïncide. »] A partir de ce moment, la conscience *peut* vraiment s'imaginer qu'elle est autre chose que la conscience de la pratique existant, qu'elle représente réellement quelque chose sans représenter quelque chose de réel. A partir de ce moment, la conscience est en état de s'émanciper du monde et de passer à la formation de la théorie « pure », théologie, philosophie, morale, etc. Mais, même lorsque cette théorie, cette théologie, cette philosophie, cette morale, etc., entrent en contradiction avec les rapports existants, cela ne peut se produire que du fait que les

[133] *Ibid*., p. 237. Passage partiellement cité dans *WW*.

> rapports sociaux existants sont entrés en contradiction avec la force productive existante[.][134]

Nous proposons que la recommandation ici sous-entendue n'est pas celle d'un « retour à la nature ». Plutôt, la contradiction entre théorie et pratique s'inscrit constitutivement au sein de la théorie, et les auteurs ne parlent pas de manière sarcastique de l'émancipation. *La pensée est une torsion*, une torsion entre être et devoir-être, hétéronomie et autonomie, « purification » et « saleté » ou « crasse » (des figures qui n'ont nullement d'intention moralisante). La pensée *est* ce fait de se déchirer et de se scinder elle-même, à ceci près qu'aucun affranchissement n'est garanti, et qu'il se peut très bien – en dépit des connotations de dynamisme que recèlent les mots « torsion » et « pression » – qu'elle séjourne longuement dans l'étreinte de contradictions monotones et automatistes.

Que les forces productives de la *théorie pure* entrent en contradiction avec les rapports sociaux, cela implique – à l'encontre de tout matérialisme vulgaire – qu'*il y ait* des forces productives *purement théoriques*. Parmi lesquelles les mathématiques. Albert Lautman et Jean Cavaillès affirment contre Bertrand Russel l'absoluité de la découverte mathématique, son autonomie ainsi que son caractère imprévisible et porteur de contenus singuliers. Cependant, la poursuite d'un *matérialisme* sellarso-hégélien (bien qu'il soit un matérialisme idéaliste) nous amène à remettre en cause le recours que Cavaillès fait à Spinoza et le choix de Lautman de se référer à Heidegger. N'est-il pas possible de rester fidèle à l'absoluité des vérités mathématiques, *et* en même temps de soutenir que le « constructivisme pratique » est un moment incontournable dans l'épistémologie des mathématiques ? Et ce but pourrait-il se réaliser à l'aide du platonisme hétéroclite d'invariances de Sellars ? Dans l'optique de ce dernier, il n'y aura pas d'autre choix que d'admettre que le triangle est normativement individué, donc dans un sens *socialement* individué. En même temps, si nous prêtons allégeance à une conception non-substantielle des Vérités comme les autoréflexions de ce-qui-n'est-pas, alors, n'est-ce pas le cas de ce conditionnement ne pouvant empêcher que la Vérité de la somme des trois angles égalant à 18O degrés soit non-relativisable ?

Hegel ne rejette pas *tous* les propos de Spinoza, et avant de conclure l'étude nous passons en revue un exemple de ce dernier d'un infini mathématique qui est cité par

[134] Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *L'idéologie allemande (première partie)*, dir. Michèle Kiintz, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1972 [1846], p. 99.

Hegel, s'agissant d'une propriété de la géométrie d'un cercle décentré à l'intérieur d'un autre cercle[135]. Rien ne manque à la détermination concrète de l'infini dont il s'agit, et il n'y a pas d'incomplétude en vue. Mais la contradiction qui nous aura le plus intéressée est celle entre l'*acte* et la *détermination*. La complétude d'une détermination ne change rien à la « torsion » propre à cette contradiction.

F. Conclusion

La Loi est-elle impérieusement impérative ?

Connaître des noumènes ne peut pas arriver *seulement* en suivant des règles *entièrement* arbitraires qui ne permettrait pas à de la nécessité logique d'être rétroactivement construite. Chez Hegel, nous n'avons pas seulement le *devoir-être* (et nous affirmons qu'Hegel n'a jamais su se débarrasser de ce *devoir-être*) ; nous avons aussi la Loi de la chose, de la déterminité dont il est question : la Loi de la forme. L'intelligibilité des invariances qualitativement différenciées de la chose est sa Loi, est la chose n'est rien d'autre que cette Loi. Ceci n'empêche pas qu'il y ait de l'erreur et un apprentissage opaque, comme nous le voyons dans le passage suivant, sur le mécanisme. D'une part, le mécanisme, en tant que *pour-soi*, est pleinement effectif : en en éclaircissant l'idée nous « perçons le noumène ». D'autre part Hegel affirme que cet éclaircissement n'est nullement évident et qu'il faut *travailler* l'idéalité avec un aiguillon électrifié et d'autres outils déterminément négateurs afin de le faire « sortir du four » :

> Cette unité auto-déterminante, reconduisant absolument l'objectivité extérieure dans l'idéalité, est un principe d'*auto-mouvement* ; la *déterminité* de ce facteur donnant de l'âme, déterminité qui est la différence du concept lui-même, est la *loi*. – Le mécanisme mort était le processus mécanique considéré d'objets qui apparaissaient immédiatement comme subsistant-par-soi, mais, précisément pour cette raison, sont, en vérité, non-subsistante-par-soi et ont leur centre hors d'eux ; ce processus qui passe dans le repos montre, ou bien une *contingence* et une inégalité indéterminée, ou bien une *uniformité formelle*. Cette

[135] Cf. Corry Shores, « Gueroult's "Spinoza's Letter on the Infinite (Letter XII, to Louis Meyer)", summarized », http://piratesandrevolutionaries.blogspot.com/2008/12/gueroults-spinozas-letter-on-infinite.html.

> uniformité est bien une *règle*, mais pas une *loi*. Seul, le mécanisme libre à une *loi*, la détermination propre de l'individualité pure ou du *concept étant pour soi* ; la loi est, en tant que différence en soi-même, une source impérissable d'un mouvement s'enflammant lui-même ; en tant que, dans l'idéalité de sa différence, elle se rapporte seulement à soi, elle est la *libre nécessité*.[136]

Hegel s'oppose à la calcification chez Kant d'une notion newtonienne de la causalité naturelle, en fonction de laquelle les pouvoirs naturels se cognent les uns contre les autres au sein d'une théorie bétonnée d'inertie et de choc à la manière d'un jeu de flipper. Chez Kant ces pouvoirs sont « en-soi », mais ne sauraient être « pour-soi ». Ils sont passifs, mais nous aurons vu que l'*activité* n'exclut pas le caractère acéphale. Aux yeux d'Hegel, on peut rendre compte de ce-qui-n'est-pas-la-pensée *seulement* au sein d'une *idéalité absolue* dont les formes (immédiates) se renversent en contenus (médiatisés), sans avoir besoin – nous imitons le ton polémique d'Hegel – de s'alimenter par l'intériorisation d'une loi morale provenant de l'auto-asphyxie hypocritement ladre de la société bourgeoise-capitaliste. Nous proposons qu'Hegel ait bien raison (concernant la modalité de la donation – ou de la détermination ou de la production – du donné catégoriel-cognitif) de balayer ainsi la passivité, *sans perdre* l'*hétéronomie*. Sellars scinde l'activité elle-même entre réflexive et acéphale, la sensation s'appartenant à la dernière classe d'*activité*.[137] Cela entraîne que la causalité ne peut jamais écraser la spontanéité, non seulement parce que la spontanéité légifère sur le statut causal de l'objet, mais aussi parce que la notion kantienne du noumène se voit récusée de par son caractère constitutivement non-relationnel qui échapperait, par glissement, aux dents de la découverte cognitive – elle-même n'ayant dès lors guère d'autre occupation que de mâcher avec ressentiment le chewing-gum fade du « *comme si* ». Il s'agit du rejet hégélien de la substance-en-soi kantienne, laquelle était non-contradictoire, identique-à-soi, et ontologiquement auto-suffisante – et donc inconnaissable[138]. Ceci, Hegel a voulu

[136] G. W. F. Hegel, *Science de la Logique. Livre troisième – Le concept*, tr. Bernard Bourgeois, Paris, Vrin, 2016 [1816], p. 190-191.

[137] Point discuté dans l'Introduction de *WW*.

[138] Kant avait écrit qu'

le disqualifier – avec raison, nous sommes pour l'instant convaincu – de même qu'il a disqualifié l'exclusion oppositive du sujet « ici » et de la substance « là-bas ».

Cependant, si Hegel a cédé à la tentation de croire que l'idée absolue *produit* ses propres contenus d'elle-même de manière *auto-transparente*, nous concluons que cela va à l'encontre de son propre postulat de l'opacité entre, d'un côté, l'« intériorité » intra-réfléchie qui réussit à se-rapporter-à-soi et à se consolider dans une concrétisation équilibrée, et, de l'autre côté, l'extériorité unilatéralement indifférente et réfractaire à cette différence intégralement saisissable. Nous avons appliqué la lame critique fournie par Sellars et par d'autres matérialistes qui ont regardé Hegel un peu de travers, sans passer outre, et de cet exercice nous avons tiré le résultat que l'intériorisation absolutisante se fait seulement par le biais de l'intermédiaire – la matière – de l'extériorité opaque.

Reconnaître le caractère d'« entre-deux », de « ni-ceci-ni-cela », propre à la matière-intermédiaire de tout possible « savoir absolu » portant sur les Lois des choses ne peut qu'avoir pour conséquence que l'activité qui cherche l'autodépassement soit toujours susceptible d'échouer. Ce qui arrive, de manière auto-opaque, à faire s'enflammer des feux s'auto-enflammant ne peut lui-même être un feu s'auto-enflammant. (Lacan se mettrait d'accord avec la négation dans cette phrase). Hegel pense que la *mesure* – la combinaison de quantité et de qualité – est « *la vérité concrète de l'être* »[139]. Cependant, lorsque – suite à une réflexion sur la proximité, pour lui

> à travers de simples relations, une chose en soi ne peut en tout cas être connue ; dès lors, le jugement s'impose que, dans la mesure où, par le sens externe [l'espace], ne nous sont données que de simples représentations de relations, celui-ci ne peut contenir lui aussi dans sa représentation que la relation d'un objet au sujet, et non pas la réalité intrinsèque qui appartient à l'objet en soi. Il en est de même avec l'intuition interne [le temps]. (I. Kant, *Critique de la raison pure*, tr. Alain Renaut, B67, p. 138. Nos interpositions. Non-cité dans *WW*.)

Gardons à l'esprit que chez Kant il n'y pas de donation réflexivement accessible de l'intuition quelconque sauf au travers du *jugement*. Les ramifications et corollaires de la déclaration citée sont explorés à plusieurs reprises dans *WW* – par exemple, dans la sous-section 4 du Chapitre 1 (intitulée « Que veut dire "transcendantal" ? », p. 47-51) – au même titre que le sont les critiques post-kantiennes, et surtout hégéliennes – par exemple, dans le Chapitre 7, autours de la question du temps (et en particulier p. 169-171).

[139] G. W. F. Hegel, *SLÊ*, p. 511.

malheureuse, de Kant et Spinoza au principe d'anéantissement Brahmanique – il admet que « La mesure est, certes, une manière d'être *extérieure* »[140], n'est-ce pas parce qu'il se rend compte que la spontanéité ne peut qu'être *inconditionnée*, alors que *la décision* ne peut que receler inexorablement une goutte de *sous-détermination* ? Le *devoir-être*, la norme, est donc un pic à glace *nécessaire*.

Cela étant dit, cela se défend que concevoir la Loi comme nous l'avons conçue, comme elle-même – dans sa « splendeur » même – sordidement « impérieusement impérative », revient à articuler son *Idée* : son *universel concret*. Comme Hegel lui-même l'écrit :

> Ce qui dure est estimé plus élevé que ce qui a tôt fait de passer ; mais toute fleur, toute belle vitalité connaît une mort précoce. Cependant, dure aussi ce qu'il y a de plus excellent, non pas simplement l'universel sans vie, inorganique, mais aussi l'autre universel, ce qui est dans soi-même concret, le genre, la loi, l'Idée, l'esprit. Car il nous faut distinguer si quelque chose est le processus total ou seulement un moment du processus. L'universel, en tant que loi, a aussi un processus au-dedans de lui-même et n'est vivant que comme processus ; cependant, il n'est pas une partie du processus, il n'est pas dans le processus, mais il contient ses deux côtés et il est lui-même hors de tout processus. Suivant le côté du phénomène, la loi entre dans le temps, pour autant que les moments du concept ont l'apparence de la subsistance-pour-soi ; mais, dans leur concept, les différences qui s'excluent se comportent comme réconciliées et ramenées à la paix.[141]

Il se peut très bien qu'en tant que loi, l'universel est *en même temps* processus – et même processus sanglant. Néanmoins, nous nous devons d'empêcher la contradiction entre théorie et pratique d'éclipser ce qu'il y a de purement – *atemporellement – non-pratique* dans l'intelligible. En parallèle, la critique qui peut s'adresser à Sellars, c'est que la « percée » du noumène ne se situe pas seulement sur le seuil du savoir de la nature, de

[140] *Ibid.*, p. 510-511. Ce passage est discuté dans la première sous-section du huitième Chapitre de *WW*.

[141] G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophie de la nature*, p. 362.

la *physis*. Il y a une manière de percer l'erreur qui s'effectue lorsque quelqu'un « traverse leur phantasme » (Lacan) qui n'est pas écarté par un million d'années-lumière de la perforation à travers laquelle Cantor découvre des nouvelles propriétés de l'infini mathématique dans la droite numérique réelle.

Le problème du Nouveau

Le Nouveau n'est pas le gonflement d'un paramètre quantitativement chiffrable. Au contraire, nous proposons que l'autodépassement soit une *torsion qualitative* : un déphasage dans la qualité de la pratique (autodéterminant vs dépendant). Ce qui pose problème est que l'acte est opaque-à-soi. Nous suggérons que la solution de ce problème est la réhabilitation de l'*Idée Absolue*, tissé d'une négativité-se-rapportant-à-soi sous-déterminée, structurée par des différences logiquement irréversibles de la forme de l'unité-en-contradiction des opposés, et sans garantie que nous puissions réussir à la construire et la découvrir (les deux termes s'équivalant). Cet Absolu ne fait rien pour *nous* aider, mais sa construction *par nous* serait le seul moyen dont nous disposons afin de rompre avec les paramètres qui nous sont imposés par le néolibéralisme.

La temporalité successive inflige aux penseurs finis de l'impuissance et du désarroi – donc, *une espèce* de passivité – face à *ce qui arrive*. Mais comment devenir pleinement actif sinon qu'en s'emparant des déterminités avec lesquelles la succession nous frappe, afin (en quelque sorte) de *renverser* cette impuissance, en la *reversant* ? Et comment rompre avec l'impuissance de la passivité éprouvée face au séquentiel (qui est donc « mauvaisement infini ») sinon qu'en soudant la pratique à quelque chose d'intelligiblement non-successif, tel que l'Idée absolue d'Hegel ? La négation déterminée serait ainsi comme un isotope nucléaire qui ne fissionne que dès lors que nous réussissons à le faire fissionner.

Ceci est bel et bien la métaphore que l'hégélien voudra tirer des remarques d'Adorno vers la fin de sa *Dialectique Négative*, remarques qui posent la « Ruine » et le « déclin » comme des indices de liberté *même au sein de ce qu'est le régime d'auto-étranglement qui fut celui du capitalisme selon Adorno* : « Le moment, néanmoins, où nature et histoire deviennent l'un à l'autre commensurables, c'est celui de la Ruine (*Vergängnis*) » ; « la catégorie séculaire absolue, celle du déclin (*Verfall*) ».[142] L'hégélien

[142] T. W. Adorno, *Dialectique négative*, traduit par un groupe de traduction du Collège de philosophie : Gérard Coffin, Joëlle Masson, Olivier Masson, Alain Renaut & Dagmar Trousson, Paris, Payot & Rivages, 2001 [1966], p. 346. Seuls les mots clés sont cité dans *WW*.

va vouloir y voir une torsion négative (imprévisible) de fission qui s'affirme contre toute positivité donnée, contre des Donnés Mythiques telles que, par exemple, les efflorescences positivement quantifiables de la « croissance » néolibérale. Toutefois, la visée d'Adorno est moins amicale en ce qui concerne Hegel :

> Au cœur de la conception hégélienne de la dialectique et en opposition avec elle, la dichotomie simpliste du temporel et de l'éternel est conforme au primat de l'universel dans l'histoire de la philosophie. Le concept universel, fruit de l'abstraction, se croit au-dessus du temps, et la perte que le processus d'abstraction fait subir aux choses subsumées, il l'inscrit au bénéfice et à l'ordre de l'éternité ; en ce sens les moments de l'histoire qu'on prétend supra-temporels deviennent des éléments positifs. En eux se cache pourtant le mal ancestral. Être d'accord pour que rien ne change jamais, c'est discréditer, en la qualifiant d'éphémère, la pensée qui proteste contre l'état de fait. Un tel revirement vers l'atemporalité n'est pas quelque chose d'extérieur à la dialectique et à la philosophie de l'histoire hégéliennes. En tant que sa version de la dialectique s'étend au temps lui-même, celui-ci est ontologisé ; de forme subjective, il devient structure de l'être en général, il devient lui-même quelque chose d'éternel.[143]

Il faut sans doute reconnaître que notre propos, dans sa conclusion, se confronte à des problèmes nouveaux et philosophiquement sérieux concernant le temps. Cependant, si la perspicacité d'Adorno touche certaines cibles dans ce passage, il se peut que d'autres soient ratées. D'abord, il n'est pas sûr que l'éternel s'aligne ou s'identifie à l'ontologiquement *positif*. Et une question se pose : le successif garderait-t-il son intelligibilité dans l'absence du non-successif qui paraîtrait essentiel à l'intelligibilité en tant que telle ? Si le déficit et l'attente propre au décalage entre le *devoir-être* et l'*être* étaient cicatrisés, avec pour finalité d'être réconciliés, le Nouveau ainsi que le Vieux ne disparaîtront-ils tout simplement pas ? Un quelconque impératif de dépasser paraîtrait

[143] *Ibid*., p. 318. Passage non-cité dans *WW* mais cité ici pour sa concision et sa pertinence sommaire.

exiger qu'on ait l'occasion de faire que les éclats brisés du temporel se logent dans l'atemporel.

Dans la ligne d'interrogations qui est étroitement, bien que diagonalement, liée à celle-ci, on peut facilement voir que la musique puisse se dire une *organisation des formes de disparition passagère*. Une question plus épineuse se pose néanmoins là-dessus, car il n'y a rien d'aisé dans l'interrogation sur pourquoi ses disparitions ne disparaissent-t-elles pas elles-mêmes, ni dans l'enquête sur la forme d'organisabilité qui permet que les choses soient ainsi. Le pressentiment qui pourrait mener à des recherches supplémentaires est que la négativité du *devoir-être* ne soit pas sans rapport à l'auto-opacité-en-acte pertinente à l'idée que nous enseigne le matérialisme, que les êtres humains sont des animaux qui sont en train constamment de se hisser à travers des obstacles qui ne sont ni clairs ni distincts. Le seuil contradictoire entre bruit-en-acte et clarification-en-acte serait alors le gagne-pain de la musique. Qui plus est, Sellars donne amplement du grain à moudre à l'égard d'une unité-en-contradiction de la disparition de l'acte – sa fugacité – et la déterminité qu'il détermine.

Cependant, sous-entendre que le desiderata du dépassement des contradictions ne soit rien de plus que des nouvelles contradictions ne saurait être suffisant. Le mauvais infini nous menace dans la forme d'une série de contradictions remplaçant indifféremment d'autres contradictions. Cela renvoie à *Antigone* comme lu par Lacan vers 1960. L'indifférence immortelle et solidement bétonnée au cœur de la Loi de la cité fait que la seule manière dans laquelle Antigone peut interpréter la face cachée du visage officiel de cette Loi est de dire « non ! » à toute chose et à tout *détruire*, elle-même y compris. Nous avons dû néanmoins nous efforcer d'enquêter sur la désubstantialisation et la dés-ontologisation de la Loi par le biais du *devoir-être*.

Il semble que la proposition d'Hegel est que le mauvais infini s'évite seulement lorsque *la contradiction est elle-même contredite*. Or, le seuil contradictoire qui est le gagne-pain des sciences modernes de la nature est celui qui se situe entre la cause (l'hétéronomie externe, *die Ohnmacht der Natur* : l'impuissance de la nature) et la spontanéité (l'autonomie, la réflexion-de-soi). Il faut alors se demander : Comment contredira-t-il cette contradiction ?

La spontanéité n'est dotée d'intelligibilité que grâce à sa manière de contredire la fatalité. Néanmoins – à rejeter la substance classique cause-de-soi et auto-dévoilant – la compulsion hétéronome doit se déceler au sein de toute liberté digne de ce nom, digne puisqu'active. Pour se concrétiser, la liberté ne saurait se passer, par voie d'auto-

ratification, de déterminer une détermination. À moins de se piquer d'un caprice de cloisonnement, l'on s'empêchera de dire que cette ratification s'accouche d'elle-même ; elle s'empare plutôt d'un conditionnement hétéronome. Elle ne s'échappe donc pas à la tâche de se distinguer des fins et des moyens, distincts les uns des autres. Les moyens aux fins qu'il vaut la peine de poursuivre sont des *valeurs d'usage*. Mais l'usage ne se concrétise dans l'intelligibilité que grâce à la manière qu'il a de contredire l'inutilité. De surcroît, les valeurs d'usages concrètes sont restreintes par la forme-valeur (c'est-à-dire, par l'abstraction socialement contraignante qui permet l'extraction de la plus-value). Et l'intelligibilité de la causalité – de la compulsion, ou de la fatalité – a besoin de la spontanéité qui s'établit comme la condition de toute et n'importe quelle intelligibilité. Est-ce que cela veut dire que l'*inutilité* puisse contredire la contradiction entre cause et spontanéité, par le biais de son indifférence à la distinction entre hétéronomie et autonomie ?

Une fois cette question posée, il semble que le problème qui jaillira portera sur la difficulté de s'assurer qu'un mouvement d'inutilité supposément négateur a bien été accompli. Faudrait-il alors que l'idée de l'inutilité s'allie à la négation *déterminée* ?

Si le matérialisme a jugé que chez Hegel la dialectique marchait sur la tête, le remettre sur les pieds n'équivaut pas l'abandonner. Soit. Mais peut-être que le *devoir-être* chez *Kant*, son initiateur, marchait sur la tête. Une fois le Mythe du Donné abandonné, quoi d'autre aura de la force épistémique de nous infliger la connaissance de la différence qualitative ?

G. Indications bibliographiques, ainsi qu'extra-philosophiques, pour chaque partie

N.B. Les ouvrages théoriques sont listés dans l'ordre d'apparition dans l'exposé dans *WW*. Dans *WW* les versions anglaises des textes sont citées lorsque cela était possible. Afin de faciliter la reprise de la lecture, ce résumé recueille les versions françaises des textes qui sont originairement en français ou qui sont disponibles en traduction française. Les listes des références ne relevant pas de la philosophie ni de la théorie critique (marquées « * ») ne suivent pas de principe d'ordonnance rigide.

Introduction

COMAY, Rebecca et RUDA, Frank, *The Dash* [*Le Tiret / La Course*] – *The Other Side of Absolute Knowing*, Cambridge/Londres, MIT Press, 2018.

LONGUENESSE, Béatrice, *Kant et le pouvoir de juger*, Paris, PUF, 1993.

Section I – L'Hyperkantisme

Chapitre 1 – La Tache entre impression et substance : une histoire

LARUELLE, François, *The Concept of Non-Photography (Édition bilingue),* tr. anglaise Robin Mackay, Falmouth/NY, Urbanomic/Sequence, 2011.

ŽIŽEK, Slavoj, *Jacques Lacan à Hollywood, et ailleurs*, tr. Frédéric Joly, Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, 2010 [1992].

MACBETH, Danielle, *Realizing Reason: A Narrative of Truth and Knowing*, Oxford, OUP, 2014.

KANT, Immanuel, *Critique de la raison pure*, tr. Alain Renaut, Flammarion, 2006, [1781/1783].

HEGEL, Georg Wilhelm Freidrich, *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*, tr. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, Paris, Flammarion, 2012 [1807].

Chapitre 2 – L'Inox non-standard : Laruelle et la non-suffisance

LARUELLE, François, *Une biographie de l'homme ordinaire. Des Autorités et des Minorités*, Paris, Aubier, 1985.

LARUELLE, François, *Théorie des identités. Fractalité généralisée et philosophie artificielle*, Paris, PUF, 1992.

LARUELLE, François, *Les philosophies de la différence. Introduction critique*, Paris, PUF, 1986.

* Karlheinz Stockhausen. Philip Guston. Francisco de Goya. Amanda Beech : vidéos « Gz and Hustlas » (2003), et « Sanity Assassin » (2010).

* La critique de la réification métaphysique de la mécanique quantique, ainsi que de celle du fractal.

Section II – Casser le cercle ensorcelé

Chapitre 3 – Compossibiliser contre le « Mythe du Donné » les thèses d'Adorno de 1938 sur la musique et la forme de la marchandise

ADORNO, Theodor Wiesengrund, « Le Caractère fétiche dans la musique et la régression de l'écoute », tr. Christophe David, Paris, Éditions Allia, 2001 [1938].

LACAN, Jacques, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse [Séminaire livre XI, 1964]*, Seuil, 1973.

MARX, Karl, *Le Capital. Critique de l'économie politique. Livre I*, dir. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, Paris, Quadrige/PUF, 1993 [1867] ; 1ière-3ème Sections.

SELLARS, Wilfrid, *Empirisme et philosophie de l'esprit*, tr. Fabien Cayla, Éditions de l'éclat, 1992 [1956].

* Haydn. Mozart. Alban Berg. Derek Bailey. L'improvisation libre et les musiques bruitistes.

Chapitre 4 – Mines d'or inépuisables

MERTENS, Wim, *American Minimal Music*, tr. anglaise J. Hautekiet, Londres, Kahn & Averill, 1983.

ADORNO, T. W., *Dialectique négative*, tr. Gérard Coffin, Joëlle Masson, Olivier Masson, Alain Renaut & Dagmar Trousson, Paris, Payot & Rivages, 2001 [1966].

* Schoenberg. Stravinsky. Iannis Xenakis : *Metastasis* (composition de 1954 ; 1ère candidature d'irréversibilité logique musicale). Steve Reich. Throbbing Gristle. Esplendor Geometrico. Daniel Lopatin ; Ramona Xavier (2ème candidature d'irréversibilité logique musicale ; notons ici qu'ils ont puisé de l'inspiration de Robert Earl Davis Jr.). Fatima Al Qadiri : *Desert Strike* (enregistrement de 2012 ; label : Fade to Mind ; 3ème candidature d'irréversibilité logique musicale).

* Albert Einstein. Ludwig Boltzmann.

Section III – Desubstantialiser l'infini

Chapitre 5 – Limite et *devoir-être*

KANT, I., *Prolégomènes à toute métaphysique future qui pourra se présenter comme science*, tr. Louis Guillermit, Paris, Vrin, 2016 [1783].

HEGEL, G. W. F., *Science de la Logique.* [1812, 1816, 1832].

Chapitre 6 – La Non-identité de l'identité : Hegel, Badiou, et l'infini quantitatif

BADIOU, Alain, *L'Être et l'Événement*, Paris, Seuil, 1988.

HEGEL, G. W. F., *Science de la Logique.* [1812, 1816, 1832]. « *SLÊ »* en marque le *Livre premier – L'être. Textes de 1812 et 1832*, tr. Bernard Bourgeois, Paris, Vrin, 2015.

LEBRUN, Gérard, *La Patience du concept. Essai sur le discours hégélien*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972.

* La critique d'Hayek & Friedman. La critique du néolibéralisme.

* La théorie des ensembles de Zermelo-Fraenkel. Les Alephs de Cantor. Le calcul différentiel.

Section IV – Impérieusement impératif [*Fraught with ought*]

Chapitre 7 – Le connaître successif et l'occurrence métaphysique : hégélianiser la solution hyperkantienne

SELLARS, Wilfrid, « Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process. The Carus Lectures of Wilfrid Sellars», *The Monist* 64 (1), 1981, p. 3-90. http://www.ditext.com/sellars/carus200.html. « FMPP »

VUILLEMIN, Jules. *L'héritage kantien et la révolution copernicienne. Fichte – Cohen – Heidegger*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1954.

* Les « vers » d'espace-temps quadridimensionnel de Minkowski. La critique de la réification métaphysique du modèle neurophysiologique (ainsi que simplement de l'espace et du temps).

* La critique du lovecraftiennisme (du poétique d'H. P. Lovecraft).

Chapitre 8 – Les Contradictions-en-pratique, et en dehors

QUINE, Willard Van Orman, *Du point de vue logique. Neuf essais logico-philosophiques*, dir. Sandra Laugier, traduit sous la direction de Sandra Laugier, Paris, Vrin, 2003 [1953].

LAKATOS, Imre, « La falsification et la méthodologie des programmes de recherche scientifique », dans Imre Lakatos, *Histoire et Méthodologie des sciences. Programmes de recherches et reconstruction rationnelle*, dir. Luce Girard, tr. Catherine Malamoud & Jean-Fabien Spitz, Paris, PUF, 1994 [1970], p. 1-146.

HEGEL, G. W. F., *Philosophie de la nature*, tr. Bernard Bourgeois, Paris, Vrin, 2004 [1830].

MARX, Karl, *Manuscrits de 1857-1858 dits « Grundrisse »*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 2011.

SELLARS, Wilfrid, *Naturalism and Ontology: The John Dewey Lectures for 1974*. Atascadero, Ridgeview, 1996 [1979].

SELLARS, Wilfrid, *Science, Perception, and Reality*, Atascadero, Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1991 [1963].

NIETZSCHE, Friedrich, *La généalogie de la morale*, tr. Henri Albert, Paris, Mercure de France, 1900 [1887].

BACHELARD, Gaston, *La philosophie du non*. *Essai d'une philosophie du nouvel esprit scientifique*, Paris, Quadrige/PUF, 2008 [1940].

KOYRÉ, Alexandre, « De l'influence des conceptions philosophiques sur l'évolution des théories scientifiques », 1954, détails du recueil indisponible, numérotation de l'article exceptée : p. 239 -240.

BADIOU, Alain, *Théorie du sujet*, Paris, Seuil, 1982.

MARX, Karl, et ENGELS, Friedrich, *L'idéologie allemande (première partie)*, dir. Michèle Kiintz, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1972 [1846].

LAUTMAN, Albert, *Essai sur les notions de structure et d'existence en mathématiques*, *Actualités scientifiques et industrielles* 590 & 591, Paris, Hermann, 1938.

CAVAILLÈS, Jean, *Sur la logique et la théorie de la science*, dir. Georges Canguilhem & Charles Ehresmann, Paris, Vrin, 2008 [1942].

SELLARS, Wilfrid, « Vlastos and "The Third Man" », dans W. Sellars, *Philosophical Perspectives: History of Philosophy*, Atascadero, Ridgeview, 1977 [1955].

* La critique du rôle du présupposé de *transparence* dans le « libéralisme conciliatoire ».

* Aristote et Riemann, tel qu'alliés – selon Koyré – par Einstein (candidature phare d'irréversibilité logique s'apparentant aux sciences naturelles).

* Le décalage contradictoire entre la biologie et la physique.

* Le dernier théorème de Fermat. La théorie des nœuds.

* Les infinis mathématiques *complètes* selon Hegel.

Conclusion

* Sophocle, *Antigone*.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the manner in which philosophical resources elaborated by G.W.F. Hegel and Wilfrid Sellars may allow for the recasting of two problems: (a) The problem of the '*ought*', and (b) 'The Problem of Novelty'.

The thesis proposes that novelty and the New must be conceived qualitatively and – in a broad sense – antagonistically. Quantifiable usefulness is put into question as a criterion for success. However, uselessness is argued to be inseparable from a concept of use. This premise is reached on the basis of a dialectical account of determinacy as an interiorization which, rather than excluding exteriority, has it as its medium.

(a) The thesis examines a certain post-Hegelian insistence that the '*ought*' – understood as the unhinging of the acts of thinking from direct tutelage to the *is*: to the way things *are* in nature or in society – must be retained and attributed with full effectivity. One reason for this insistence is that, after Kant, the rejection of the correspondence-by-resemblance theory of representation introduces an epistemic opacity between knowledge and known. Whence Sellarsian constructivism with respect to triangles, and whence a search in Hegel for moments where, in spite of his own tendencies, *effectivity* threatens to become detached from his conception of *actuality*. The 'externality' of the *ought*, qua the inevitability of heteronomous dependence and social 'estrangement', as well as knowing's reliance upon illusory metaphysical substantiality are invoked to argue that there is indeed a gap between *ought* and *is*.

(b) In line with the *logical form* of quality which Hegel outlines near the beginning of his *Science of Logic* – whereby qualitative difference is structured through the constitutive reference of a property to its contradicting opposite – the thesis investigates a conception of surpassing as a contradiction or determinate negation of the Old. It is argued that the New – in art and elsewhere – which effectuates what Hegel calls a 'good infinity' must be figured as a *torsion*, and the suggestion is made that it be linked to the production of new *qualitative logical irreversibilities* which are 'absolute', in the sense of non-relativizable.

It is argued that such a stance may serve to carry forward Imre Lakatos's best insights regarding the imperative to surpass in the natural sciences. Such a pointedly neo-Hegelian move is motivated by a survey of commodity fetishism which pinpoints abstract production, qua source of criteria for success, as in thrall to what Sellars calls the 'Myth of the Given'. Concordantly, Alexandre Koyré is read as challenging the paradigm of incommensurability which claims his influence with a historiography of full-bloodedly *antagonistic* conceptual contradiction. These considerations lead to open questions regarding time and temporality.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....5

Section I Hyperkantianism

Chapter 1 The Stain between Impression and Substance: a History.....39

1. The problem of sense-impressions and auto-intelligible substance.....40
2. The problem of the continuity of sensation and infinite incompossibility.....44
3. The crux of non-trivial meaninglessness suppressed by empty indeterminacy.....45
4. What does 'transcendental' mean?.....47
5. The jargon of 'universal' and 'particular'.....51

Chapter 2 Non-Standard Stainless: Laruelle and Non-sufficiency.....56

1. Radical immanence.....56
2. Determination in the last instance and Unilateralization.....57
3. Inconsistency, and the desubstantialization of the void.....59
4. Narrative noise and the opacity of the phantasy.....65
5. The non-givenness of incommensurability, and non-logic.....68
6. A superposition: inverted desire and pure clone.....71

Section II Breaking the Magic Circle

Chapter 3 Towards an Anti-Mythical-Givenist Compossibilization of Adorno's 1938 Theses on Music and the Commodity-Form.....75

1. Orpheus quashed.....76
2. Anti-Pythagoreanism.....77
3. Pleasure, timbre, decision.....80
4. Commodity fetishism and the value-form.....88
5. Use-value and intellectualist Givenness.....90

Chapter 4 Inexhaustible Goldmines.....118

1. Non-identity and *Aufhebung*.....118
2. Temporalities and non-time.....124
3. Sublimating sublimation.....127
4. Raising the question of Novelty.....129

Section III Desubstantializing the Infinite

Chapter 5 Limit and the *ought*.....133

1. The Kantian 'boundary'.....133
2. The paradoxical *is-ought* relation in Hegel.....137

Chapter 6 The Non-Identity of Identity: Hegel, Badiou, and the Quantitative Infinity.....141

0. The 'good' and 'bad' infinities.....141
I.
1. Hegel: the qualitative 'something'.....145
2. The negation of the negation.....147
3. The 'bad' qualitative infinity.....148
4. The 'good' qualitative infinity.....150
5. Repetitional of repetition or self-relating negativity?.....151
II.
6. Badiou: exclusive negativity.....155
7. The quantitative infinity: good or bad?.....157
III.
8. Syntax without semantics, and the stochastic.....159
9. Hegel again: the non-identity of identity, and vice versa.....160
10. Negating the immediacy of contingency.....162

Section IV Fraught with *Ought*

Chapter 7 Successional Knowing and Metaphysical Happening: Hegelianizing the Hyperkantian Solution.....166

1. A trilemma in Sellars regarding temporalities.....166
2. Succession contradicting absolute coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be.....181
3. Death and non-death.....182

Chapter 8 Contradictions-in-Practice, and Out.....190

1. The trouble with 'prediction': Quine and Lakatos.....190
2. The discontinuity in Quine's continuum.....204
3. Sellarsian 'picturing' and functional-role semantics.....208
4. Wrong Wrongness.....223
5. The dialectics of inside and outside and the structural thematics of envelopment.....225
6. Contradiction and incommensurability.....232
7. Historical-materialist pessimism and historical-materialist optimism.....239
8. Mathematical heteronomy: In pursuit of Albert Lautman's mission.....241

Conclusion.....254

1. Is the Law fraught with ought?.....254
2. The Problem of Novelty.....257

Bibliography.....261

Introduction

This thesis proposes that novelty must be conceived *qualitatively* and – broadly – as *antagonistic*. It argues that, if – in the technical jargon of G.W.F. Hegel – qualitative difference is a matter of interior relationality, this interiority need not be taken to exclude exteriority.

The thesis investigates the manner in which the philosophical resources elaborated in the nineteenth century by Hegel and in the twentieth by Wilfrid Sellars may allow for the recasting of two problems of contemporary relevance. The two problems – which the thesis formulates through study of various primary texts – might be respectively dubbed (a) the problem of 'the *ought*', and (b) 'the Problem of Novelty', or – a more heavily loaded possible appellation, and one that will be used here less frequently – the problem of progress. To give a first shorthand of the stakes which we will claim to be in play, in the form of two slogan-riddles: the knowledge of what a triangle is cannot be said to be owed to triangularity; and music is not found but made, and so – curmudgeonly – birdsong does not count as music.

To immediately declare the concluding results of the research:

(a) We will argue that the *ought* – understood as the unhinging of the acts of thought from direct resemblance or tutelage to the *is*, to the way things might be said to *be* in nature or in society *now* – *must* be retained and *somehow* attributed with full effectivity (*Wirklichkeit*, as Hegel would put it in German), to the precise extent that, consequent upon the post-Kantian destitution of the correspondence-by-resemblance theory of representation, an epistemic *opacity* must be acknowledged not only between knowledge and material-natural thing, but also in – or, as – knowledge of the mathematical thing. Whence Sellarsian constructivism with respect to triangles.[1]

(b) And we will argue, against creeping neoliberal ideology, that novelty and newness – in art and elsewhere – cannot be classified in the gaudy pigeon-hole of quantitative optimization ('We want *more* and *more* and *more* novelty, and countable increases in its production!'), but is rather a *qualitative* affair. Hence the musician does not (in the first

[1] The Sellarso-Hegelian constructivism for which we will argue will be found to resonate with Giuseppe Longo's observation that Euclid's Second definition – 'a line is a length without thickness' – is assumed through a *decision* which is underdetermined by any sense-perceptible given. As Longo has it, 'even the filament of a spider's web has thickness; so it is impossible to draw this idea of a line from sensory experience' (Giuseppe Longo, 'The Consequences of Philosophy', *Glassbead* Site 0, 'Castalia, the Game of Ends and Means', 2016, http://www.glass-bead.org/article/the-consequences-of-philosophy/?lang=enview.).

instance) look around for whatever will increase a quantifiable parameter – 'Is this *more* or *less* exciting?' – but, on the contrary, when successful, builds a form and discovers a content which *qualitatively negates* the stale *qualitative properties* of the Old music, or of other sonic or narrative-ideological shibboleths weighing upon the *geistig* artistic moment (the historical Now of socially-conditioned self-consciousness, this latter being called by Hegel 'Spirit', *Geist*.)

The study is structured around the two problems to which these conclusions are the answers, and it gains much problematic propulsion, as well as much conceptual insight, from contemporary French philosophy, without shying away from challenges and contributions originating elsewhere. In order that the use made of Hegel and Sellars be motivated and put through its paces, among the key thinkers consulted are: in the pure conceptualization of concepts, François Laruelle and Alain Badiou; in music – as well as in the Hegelian and Marxian dialectic – T. W. Adorno; regarding the natural sciences, Alexandre Koyré and Imre Lakatos (both more or less Hegelian; problems arising – or so we shall argue – when 'less'); regarding mathematics, Albert Lautman; and in matters psychoanalytic, Jacques Lacan and Rebecca Comay.

The approach to reading Hegel and Sellars taken by the thesis is thus a synoptic one, and is indeed concerned to conduct a foray – or rather, a series of forays – into the history of philosophy and critical theory. The primary aim in these historiographical sorties is to achieve a gain in intelligibility for our two problems in their *contemporary* guises, and, inversely, to let what is topical in the problems guide the historiographical digging[2]. The methodological stance

[2] The initial impetus behind the research is epistemic and emerges at first blush through a story such as the following. What is given in knowledge is not transparently given, because this would presuppose that there can be self-presenting actualities, and such a presupposition has been queried, first by Kant and Hegel. That knowledge be thus recognized to be permeated with opacity – negativity and error – implies that it harbours a quotient of arbitrariness. This purposelessness is diagnosed by psychoanalysis as an acephalic and mechanical compulsion, and yet such a drive cannot – on pain of wishful thinking – be philosophically hardened into an antidote guaranteed to negate the falsity and inertia of the passively received given. But speaking of 'falsity' and 'error' seems to imply that a distinction can and should be drawn between 'good' (truth or reality) and 'bad' (illusion). Why draw such a distinction – and *quid juris?* Such is the rough dialectic which, like a spiral, is repeatedly stumbled upon and consistently motivates the investigation here presented.

Indeed, the mode of exposition is at first non-linear and halting, hand in hand with the negotiation of this unbalanced dialectic and the non-linearity of the investigation's subject-matter. A series of loops through Sections I to III allow the study to plot the obstacles which interest it and to collect the resources it needs, before it gathers these together in a synthetic tension in Section IV. The yield of this tension will be that it is that inferred property of the operativity of knowledge which is the 'externality' of the *ought*

adopted tends towards the idea that a given philosopher's proposals find themselves sharpened in the light of sympathetic – or, especially, *hostile* – treatments of problems identical or adjacent to those that are theirs. Thus it is with the goal of throwing into relief the thematically pertinent faultlines of contestation that the strategy employed embraces the principle that philosophical problems are never (or, at most often, only rarely) invented by individual philosophers 'out of the blue', like Athena from Zeus's head.[3]

The thesis therefore deploys a range of texts, traversed by alliances and frictions, in order to satisfy two goals. On the one hand, we aim to argue as spiritedly as possible that the results of the natural sciences and mathematics are of interest for philosophy and critique and – if we may speak in highfaluting terms – pertinent to the mission of *Geist*'s freedom. On the other hand, we aim to argue as spiritedly as possible that the particular modality of music's relevance to this mission entails that it cannot be tethered to *taste*, and must be understood through the lens of its Truth – in a sense of this word which may seem eccentric.[4]

These goals spring from and feed back into the engagement with our problems, which the thesis aims to articulate through an active labour of construction and testing. It is fundamentally to this end that a ravenously 'catholic' open-ended vigilance is employed, allowing for the most rigorous hacking out and delineation of the problems under treatment as is possible. Indeed, Hegel is read as a constructivist, and Sellars equally so, but as one who intervenes concerning the constitutive opacity of thought to itself[5] such as to underline the necessary critical stop on what

---

which will offer the promise of cutting through such 'vicious' spiraling by 'virtuously' grounding the inherent purposelessness or 'uselessness' of knowledge in negativity. But, as will be suggested in conclusion, the question then arising may be that of how to avoid *hypostatizing* uselessness itself.

[3] Such a strategy draws inspiration from the work of Danielle Macbeth, Gérard Lebrun, and Béatrice Longuenesse.

[4] Analyzing science alongside music allows one to take an interest in the non-trivial determination of their difference. This determination might, at a stretch, and as we will suggest through Adorno, be called 'non-Pythagorean' or 'anti-Pythagorean', since it is Pythagoras who cements music and mathematics together in a manner which brings to light certain of their properties, but obscures others. This question of their untethering turns in part upon the hoary but persistent and venerable old problem of the articulation of quality with quantity, or – in technical Hegelian jargon – of interiorly intra-reflected difference with indifferent externality.

[5] Better put, the opacity in question is that between the *practical act* of thinking and *what* this act determines in the ideality of self-consciousness. We would claim that this is precisely the same problem as that broached by Jean Cavaillès when he objects to Kant that the understanding and reason should not be

Kant called 'rhapsodic' enthusiasm, just as much as the necessary critical stop on excessively self-flagellating pessimism. Should the turn of phrase be permitted, and in line with the recourse that will be taken to Marx and Engels' doctrine of historical materialism – which will be interpreted as holding Hegel more stringently to his own standards – from the perspective that will be recommended to the reader, sorting the wheat from the chaff can only be done after, while, and *through* the construction *of* the wheat and the chaff.

In order to introduce the investigation, the two key problems scrutinized will first be outlined, and a review given of the narrative arc employed by the thesis in order to introduce them. Following these outlines, the contents of the thesis's four Sections and eight Chapters will be summarized. This summary will provide the occasion to set up a few important conceptual distinctions. But to immediately encapsulate the job done by each of the four sections, in reverse order: Section IV presents the grist of our Sellarso-Hegelian argument through a discussion of the natural sciences, mathematics, and time and temporality; Section III lays the ground for the intelligibility of Section 4 by expositing and defending certain of Hegel's core concepts, while also registering the importance of a critical reading of them offered by Alain Badiou; Section II motivates the necessity of our key arguments, on what might be called the 'ethical' level, by studying T. W. Adorno's early negotiation of the vicissitudes of musical creativity through the chicanes of commodity-fetishism; and Section I sets up and interrogates a foil throwing our own stance into relief – that of 'hyperkantianism' – while also establishing the basic terminology upon which the thesis relies.

Two Key Problems

Our two key quandaries are each quite complex, and our goal is to allow the seriousness of their dilemmas to emerge step-by-step through critical analysis of primary texts. Nonetheless, they must be sketched here, not least so that the distinctions established through the summary of Sections and Chapters appear neither unmotivated nor unnecessary.

(a) *The problem of the* ought.

---

conceived as 'irreducible powers of consciousness which are as such characterised by the property of an interior auto-illumination', and when he takes umbrage with the presupposition in Kant that '[t]he act is present to itself and so can determine itself.' (Jean Cavaillès, *Sur la logique et la théorie de la science*, eds. Canguilhem & Ehresmann, Paris: Vrin, 2008, 19. Our translation. All translations of citations of texts where the title is referenced in French are our own.) The perspicacity of this formulation of the problem resonates profoundly with – and indeed clarifies – Sellars' own mission as a critical adherent to some aspect of Kant, but not to others. However, as will be seen, the solution attempted by Sellars differs markedly from that sketched by Cavaillès.

What we propose to call 'the problem of the *ought*' has two facets, to be summarized in turn: firstly, (ai.) the issue of the 'gap between the *is* and the *ought*'; and secondly, (aii.) the issue of the antagonism between the *ought* as '*as if*' and the *ought* as *effective*.

(ai. – the gap between the *is* and the *ought*.) Firstly, there is the question of whether it makes sense at all in the first place to claim that there is a 'gap between the *is* and the *ought*'. Are things really *not as they should be*? Perhaps one will, on the contrary, be obliged to admit that what *is*, simply is, with no reason forthcoming as to why is should or could be transformed. It seems to us that the price of taking the latter stance will be that of a quieting of political (and other) ambitions and, to speak proverbially, but without facetiousness and in all sincerity, a retreat from the world to cultivate a small garden. This is, indeed, a variant of the problem of nihilism as formulated by Nietzsche. It boils down to the question as to how one might coherently maintain that an unactualized potentiality is harboured in the practice of concept-mongers[6] without relying, in order to make this claim, upon Aristotelian or Heideggerian stipulations-by-fiat of this potentiality. How to motivate, against possible quietist empiricist doubts, a compunction to change the world?

We look into the possibility that Sellars' critique of what he calls 'the Myth of the Given' (which is prefigured by Hegel's critique of 'sense-certainty') may allow one to argue that *the very facticity of determinate knowledge* already demonstrates that there is indeed a gap between the *is* and the *ought*, the very same gap as that confronted in the opacity between ideality and material act. Thus the Sellarso-Hegelian solution to be tested is that *the operativity of knowledge itself, and the inferred properties of that operativity* – namely, the 'externality' of the *ought*, qua the

[6] This is a term of Robert Brandom's (cf. Brandom, *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994, xi). Brandom was a student of Sellars's and counts himself among his acolytes, although his reading of Sellars is not uncontrovertial. Francophone readers may note that a 'fishmonger' is a *poissonnier* or *poissonière*. Hence a 'concept-monger' in the sense in which we will use the term is someone or something who deals with concepts: someone or something meeting the minimal conditions which for Kant any rational being must meet in order to be describable as a rational being – even if it is an alien or otherwise – and which Hegel would call a self-consciousness. Brandom contributes much of value to the development of certain Sellarsian points, and much of interest to the interpretation of Kant and Hegel. However, he ultimately subscribes to what is in our view a peremptory and ad hoc conciliation of social antagonisms, and this Rortyan side of his work can interest us only for its disputation. We will touch on this side of Brandom's philosophy only fleetingly, although this is in no way to imply that the negotiation with liberalism (ironist or quietist, or otherwise) is not, with reference to the political stakes of our study, a delicate and important matter.

inevitability of heteronomous dependence; as well as the inevitability of knowing's reliance upon illusorily auto-flaunting metaphysical substantiality (terms which will clarified and refined as the study proceeds) – cuts through the vicious circularity which would be implied in reifying the 'Will' as a quasi-physical force of expansion and desire-of-self. If no scrap of sense-perception or isolated non-mediated given can on its own count as concretely determinate knowledge, then a whole battery of inferentially articulated relations between concepts must already be in play before any single determination (of a triangle, for example, or a jagged line, or of the redness of a red apple) can be made. Knowledge is a 'self-correcting enterprise' (Sellars[7]) which, to begin with, is saturated with a full quotient of arbitrariness. There is no sufficient reason grounding why we represent the world the way we do, and our knowledge is always underdetermined by nature.

What then must be inferred to be the condition of possibility or the condition of effectivity of knowledge? Whatever it is – Sellars opts for '*normativity*', in a completely non-moralizing sense of the word whereby rules or standards are set (self-consciously or unconsciously) which can then either be adhered to, or not – whatever it is, it introduces a blind lack of grounding into the very heart of knowing. Hence knowing can only ground itself, revisably. Knowing does not have an inherent purpose, and, reading Hegel (with Lacan in mind), one can say that truth is per se the truth of the negation of the – so to speak – mendaciously illusory appearance of simply-given substantiality.[8]

---

[7] Sellars writes of the metaphor of a 'foundation' for knowledge that this metaphor

> is misleading because of its static character. One seems forced to choose between the picture of an elephant which rests on a tortoise (What supports the tortoise?) and the picture of a great Hegelian serpent of knowledge with its tail in its mouth (Where does it begin?). Neither will do. For empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a *foundation* but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once. (Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', in Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality*, Atascadero: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1991 [1963].)

The idea that rejecting bad circularity need not – or perhaps, cannot – entail rejecting Hegel wholesale is the central driving motivation of the study here presented.

[8] In the field of the anglophone study of European philosophy 'normativity' is often perceived as carrying unfortunate paternalistic connotations, or of implying an aloof 'meta-' framework for the commensuration of conflicting viewpoints. But in raising the matter we are interested in valences diametrically opposed to these. In Plato, is it not the standard, or norm, of *truth* which puts into question the received ideas of opinion, drawing a line of refusal in the sand? Socrates may be seen to be creating conflicts rather than diffusing them. We are interested in the valence of 'normativity' whereby insisting on the standard allowing the

[- *Intermission: the presentation's opening narrative arc, and its 'hyperkantian' foil* - .] Before summarizing the second aspect of the problem of the *ought*, let us seize upon this opportune moment to sketch the narrative arc we will employ by way of introducing it. The thesis will open with some Kantian concerns, on the rationale that the Hegelian project is best understood in light of the Kantian project. The opening of the thesis will therefore 'kill two birds with one stone' by at the same time reviewing (in Chapter 2) a current contender for the resolution of the problem of the *ought*: what we will call 'hyperkantianism'[9].

Its chief representative here will be François Laruelle, whose 'non-standard philosophy' Chapter 2 studies, but shortly after this we will also glancing see that John McTaggart's denial of the reality of time qualifies for the epithet too. Hyperkantianism is instructive as a foil allowing our stance to be thrown into relief insofar as it in fact entirely suspends the question of the *ought*, claiming – metaphorically speaking – to snap its head off, somewhat like the military general of legend who was cleanly beheaded by a swift stray cannonball. This is done, in the case of Laruelle, by arguing that the conditionedness of the appearances – in other words, the Kantian *a priori*; i.e., non-metaphysical space and time, and the categories, qua determinant of the shapes of knowable objects, forms and structures, and of constructible geometries, in and through the distinguishing and inter-relating differences amongst these knowables – which is also to say: the a priori *principle of difference* – is itself only operative as an organizing principle insofar as it is, itself, effectively determined by *real indifference*. *Ideally* differentiating *non-identity* is thus taken to be determined and effectuated only through its distinction from *real* mono-modal indivisible *identity*, which (identity) does not however in return distinguish itself from it (from non-identity or difference: from divisibility and distinguishability). Hence the 'a priori of the a priori' is a horizonless and errant determinant *indifference*, in some respects redolent of that of Neoplatonism.

---

intervention revisably dividing truth from error might, rather than wanting to withdraw from all conflicts to a serene conciliatory synoptic vantage, be envisaged as, so to speak, swinging a discursive axe with the word 'No!' graffitied on it. To extend the metaphor, the argument here will be that simply swinging the axe and saying 'no' does not alone guarantee anything. However, at the same time, is the somewhat 'violent' force of the norm not always in play in discourse, even when one is saying 'yes'? On Plato and the standard, see François Châtelet, *Platon*, Gallimard, 1965.

[9] Our choice of this appellation is supported by Reza Negarestani's reading of John McTaggart's proposal regarding the unreality of time – to be summarized momentarily – as precisely 'hyper-Kantian'. It is also supported by Rebecca Comay's talk of the option open to post-Kantian philosophers of making a 'hypertranscendental move'.

To riff further on our heuristic metaphor: the authority of relationality is stripped by Laruelle from the general's head, yet the *effectivity* of this once domineeringly procrustean head – which used to bark orders at its underlings – is not. Rather, concrete and abstract are taken to have been entirely collapsed the one into the other and indifferentiated, and this is supposed to shuck off otiose, all-too-representationalist constraints on conceptual productivity and expansion. Thus it is the *relationality* of the mundane world, to which relationality Kant thought intelligibility was donated through the *ought* (more detail on this point following in the summary of Sections and Chapters), which is supposed by hyperkantianism to have been suspended. The underdetermined epistemic-constructivist power of the Kantian *ought* is retained, and quantum matrices sprout from the severed head's eyeballs like lazer beams while vectors of generic science in the form of indifferentiated waves and particles emanate from its ears. Indeed, although we do not discuss it, this has in recent years lead Laruelle to a form of *gnosis*.[10]

What we welcome in hyperkantianism is the merciless dismantlement of the classical metaphysical conception of substance and substantiality, and the attendant refutation of the idea that there could be a transparent, unmediated access between thought and the material real.

[10] See, for example, François Laruelle, *Christo-fiction: The Ruins of Athens and Jerusalem*, trans. Robin Mackay, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015. The case of McTaggart will not be discussed at length, but, as time and temporality will rapidly become a key concern of the study, it may be helpful at this introductory moment to delineate its contours. We will have reason to – only very briefly – note (in Chapter 4) that, according to McTaggart (at least, according to one essay authored by him), time is unreal because relations of 'before' and 'after' are mere side-effects of linguistic inference, while attempts at substantive descriptions of what time is fall into contradiction, circularity, or insufficiency. All actuality must therefore be viewed as present at any one illusory moment. However – or so the Sellarso-Hegelian will object – to deny that any conceivable register of temporality may pertain, on a metaphysical level, to the thing-in-itself is to solidify the (admittedly) metaphysically *underdetermined* aspect of the conditioning of the determinable appearance, or of the discursively graspable series, into a barrier to anti-empiricist anti-intuitionist *reasoning by the absurd*. Thus we can see that McTaggart, like Laruelle, here deploys the (or, *an*) 'a priori of the a priori' to de-realize relationality: 'full actuality' (adumbrated by dismissing the shortfall that is mere potentiality) is the determinant of possible linguistic inference such that linguistic inference cannot legitimately postulate the shortfall in actuality that would be characteristic of successional temporality. The Sellarso-Hegelian and the hyperkantian will agree that such a shortfall must be characteristic of the very definition of successional temporality, because one thing coming after another presupposes that things are not present all at the same time, and this formally entails some kind of negative surplus between the actual and the potential. (The essay in question is John Ellis McTaggart, 'The Unreality of Time', *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* 17, 1908, 456-473. Available online at http://www.ditext.com/mctaggart/time.html.)

Laruelle especially succeeds in underlining that thought cannot ascend to a vantage of synoptic overview (of *survol*) encompassing its own relation with non-thought, nor of its own possibility-space, which it might thereby want to attempt to second-guess. The determinacy of the determinacies (sense-perceptible or discursive) which judgement and construction are able to determine is owed by thought not only to its own action but, in-the-last-instance, to non-thought: to what Laruelle calls 'radical immanence' or 'the One'. We woud like to propose that he should be saluted for thus demonstrating thought's non-self-sufficiency, *without* peremptorily calcifying or absolutizing the model of Gödelian incompleteness – a danger occasionally flirted with by Žižek.

However, what we reject in hyperkantianism is its attempted suspension of the in-principle *productivity* of Hegelian *negativity* (a term to be put into circulation through the introductory summary of the 'Problem of Novelty' below), through what, as we shall argue, turns out to be the surreptitious absolutization of *hypercompleteness* in the form of a separated Absolute Other-to-thought which, nonetheless, is said to block thought's articulation of *relational differences* and to block the claim that this articulation may itself play a role in influencing what is effective (*Wirklich*), and what is not, in the real. Indeed, we will offer for the reader's scrutiny the proposal that it is Hegel who has convincingly undermined the undialectical construal of the exteriority of thought as something which could block thought's own active exploration of its own outside. This is a critical proposal which we will introduce through our reading, in Section II, of an early (1938) essay by Adorno on music and the commodity form, and one which we will then pursue in Section III by studying passages from Hegel's *Logic* as well as a critical commentary on those passages undertaken by Alain Badiou.

The blockages which can be, and which are, imposed upon thought's self-surpassing are – according to Marx, who continues to adhere to Hegel on certain crucial points – always self-hobbling complex entangled estrangements *of human practice itself*, estrangements in and through its conditioning social relations. These estrangements are complex multi-level functional knottings of the enabling and constraining practical inverse or underside of what is clear-and-distinct in and to self-consciousness in ideality. It is for this reason that the research here rejects hyperkantianism and embraces the historical materialism of Marx and Engels, but with the emphasis heavily upon what this doctrine retains from Hegel. Sellars – who read Marx as a young man and who riffs repeatedly on the most famous Marxist tropes – is to be viewed as an ally and continuator of Marx's materialism, as well as critically scrutinized as such. Therefore, from the *tension* which will manifest itself between the Sellarsian and the *Hegelian* ways of conceiving of what the '*ought*' in fact *is* (if one may put it thus) we can hope to emerge recast formulations of problems and contradictions that are of interest for us today.

Such is the plot of the story spun by the study as it introduces, and then starts to tackle, its two key problems.

(aii. – the *ought* qua '*as if*' vs. the *ought* qua *effective*.) Let us return then to the introductory sketch of these two problems. The second aspect of the first problem – the second aspect of the problem of the *ought* – can be defined in shorthand as the battle of the *ought* qua '*as if*' (Kant and Fichte) against the *ought* qua fully *effective* (Hegel and Sellars). Kant's moral duty through the categorical imperative can by definition never obtain the success of actualization, for he must steer clear of contentful goals and can only avail himself of a purely formal framework through which to avoid 'pathological' causally-determined impulses and desires. For Hegel this sends Kant (and Fichte) into a 'bad infinity' of endlessly deferred non-satisfaction. Much has been made of the sado-masochism that can be diagnosed in Kant in this connection.

> Such hunger reappears in the practical sphere as the 'cold duty' that, forced to make do with itself as its sole enjoyment, is left gnawing on its own pieties – a 'last, undigested lump in the stomach' – and thus displays all the conversion symptoms of the ascetic ideal: Hegel's terms are as always prophetically Nietzschean.[11]

A crucial component of the problem is the fact that Kant has outlawed the attribution of *effectivity* to anything in particular, including to the *ought* and the act which it binds, as transgressing the limits of the conditions of possible experience by trying to speak knowledgably of unknowable noumena. In Kant, actuality – which is to say, effectivity – is but a modality applying to judgements determining the properties of spatio-temporal things seized from a vantage of exteriority whereby the judging act of application is itself aloof of effective-actual reality.[12] Kant de-realizes the *ought* because he fetishizes *abstract possibility* through the positing of rigidly necessary a prioris supposed to ground legitimate knowledge. Hegel, on the contrary, believes that there is no such thing as a necessary a priori condition of possibility for anything at all and affirms that knowledge must *ground itself* revisably.[13] In Hegel and Sellars what is

[11] Rebecca Comay, 'Hegel's Last Words' in Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash: The Other Side of Absolute Knowing*, Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 2018. Page number unavailable.

[12] As we will see, this is in fact not a million miles away from Spinoza, for whom contradictoriness is the only criterion disqualifying the actuality of a thing postulated as possible – the logical contradictoriness of it definition being taken to reveal it as impossible – and for whom modes are exterior to that which is truly effective: the infinitely and indifferently modifiable single substance.

[13] There is then indeed quite a strong analogy to be drawn between what Hegel proposes in philosophy and what Kurt Gödel will demonstrate a century later in his incompleteness theorems in mathematical metamathemics.

urgently actual and effective is the very *act* of knowing or saying itself, and hence the question of the status within actuality of the *ought* which allows this act to bind itself to a rule and distinguish itself from totally acephalic natural 'primary process' too becomes urgent. We will propose a response to this question by suggesting an alignment of Sellars with Nietzsche's aphoristic remark that the Kantian categorical imperative retains an odour of blood and torture.

Sellars deploys scientific complex-systems theory and Darwinian evolution in order to argue that 'rule obeying behaviour' – that type of behaviour implied in the binding-to-rules necessary for speech, if speech be conceived as a Wittgensteinian language-game capable of revising and constructing itself – is a case in point – a complex functional involution with new emergent characteristics – of 'pattern governed behaviour'.[14] Pattern-governed behavior is characteristic of all biological organisms. More broadly, nature insofar as we can and do gain cognitive traction upon it is composed of *patterns* (a minimalist observation which, so far as it goes, avoids metaphysical baggage pertaining to the concept of causality). The distinction between pattern-governed and rule-obeying behavior here, as well as their quickly subsequent disjunctive synthesis in an identity-in-difference, is intended to challenge the sharp cut-off between voluntary self-conscious binding-to-a-rule and unconscious *causal pulsion*.[15]

---

[14] See Wilfrid Sellars, 'Some Reflections on Language Games' in Sellars, *Science, Perception, and Reality*, Atascadero: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1991 [1963], 323-358, especially 326-329.

[15] Indeed, on our reading, it is extremely important to note that Sellars' use of natural-scientific ideas to account for intentionality is not intended as a coarse reduction. As Dionysias Chistias argues, it is, on the contrary, dialectically motivated, in that Sellars poses that the social conditioning of intentionality cannot be *explanatorily accounted for* with reference only to sociality (cf. Christias, 'The Non-Conceptual Dimension of Social Mediation: Toward a Materialist *Aufhebung* of Hegel', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 23:3, 2019, 448-473.) We indeed must treat the ordering of reasonings here dialectically: this is not an eliminative reduction of sociality and social abstraction, and if dialectics is a movement of negativity, then it is still open to the Hegelian to say that negativity 'comes first', as part and parcel of the movement which searches for explanations. Regarding sociality, Sellars writes

> It was not until the time of Hegel that the essential role of the group as a mediating factor in this causation [of the presence in the individual of the framework of conceptual thinking] was recognized, and while it is easy for us to see that the immanence and transcendence of conceptual frameworks with respect to the individual thinker is a social phenomenon, and to find a recognition of this fact implicit in the very form of our image of man-in-the-world, it was not until the nineteenth century that this feature of the manifest image was, however inadequately, taken into account. (Sellars, 'Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man', in Sellars, *Science, Perception, and Reality*, 7-43, 20-21; Christias' interposition.)

Against this polarization, Sellars' argument is that one can maintain that the turnings and wigglings of the dance danced by bees returning from a cloverfield – which turnings and wigglings indicate the position of some pollen, etc. – *can* be said to consist in moves in a language-game *without* attributing intention, or even awareness *of* the game as a game, to the bees. Their playing of the game of the dance is as irreflexive and non-intentional as a 'wiring diagram'[16]. Complex biological pattern-governed behaviour can be said, at one and the same time, to be both causally compelled, *and* normatively guided by *rules* instituted through evolutionary drift (which lacks all teleology). The bees' waggle-dance is nonetheless still non-intentional and 'acephalic', because they *are not privy to any 'metagame'* which would allow them to *talk about* and *conceptualize* the first-order game that is the dance. A qualitative shift occurs with the advent of the metagame: the capacity to *self-consciously obey rules* suddenly transforms the first-order, passively pattern-governed game itself into an actively revisable self-consciously rule-obeying game.

It is from this moment and not from anywhere else that Sellars derives intentionality *tout court*. Rule-obeying behavior is a complexification of pattern-governed behavior, which nonetheless drags it into a qualitative leap whereby compelled passivity – what Hegel calls 'the *impotence* of nature', *l'impuissance de la nature*, *die Ohnmacht der Natur* – flips over into equally compelled *active spontaneity*. We will add to this Nietzsche's remarks to the effect that the advent of rationality and the emergence of an animal capable of making promises (the human animal) is not an escape from compulsion, but rather a shift in its nature, which is henceforth of the order of a social regime of disciplinary training and (which is *not* to speak moralizingly) cruelty. The dominion of predation is exited only through a new regime of compelled unfreedom. In this way a story can be told[17] which seeks to respond to – what we interpret as – Hegel's goal (against

---

Again, Sellars' dig regarding the Hegelian inadequacy, on our view, harbours an array of interesting problems. But for the moment, we want merely to flag up that Sellars' effort here should not be taken to rule out that he might well *also* embrace the play of the recognition of recognition and the desire of desire which Hegel uses to account for self-consciousness in the dialectic of Lord and bondsman – especially not if one accepts *contradiction*.

[16] Sellars, 'Some Reflections on Language Games', 328.

[17] One can thus sketch an account (attempting a synthesis of Sellars and Lacan) about how the child has, so to speak, the 'universal' socially 'drummed into them'. The particularity of brute iteration pertaining to their babbling – a merely pattern-governed modality of utterance – 'flips over' (traverses a qualitative leap or phase-shift) into *rule-obeying* speech through the training administered by their parents and carers. The child is thus ushered into the twitchy compulsion of the law. This law would be the contentless imposition

Kant) by rendering unto the *ought* an actuality of a rather peculiar kind, such that it will no longer be stuck in a bad infinity. On this account, the *ought* non-trivially binds real material acts, and so contentful intentions *can* (as a matter of principle: abstractly speaking) be fulfilled, as it were, in the heart of the noumenon.

However, while we propose that this kind of explanation is necessary, we will not claim that this is a *sufficient* resolution to the problem, and open questions remain. Free binding-to-a-rule and unfree patterns, for example, must have their presuppositions and mutual entanglement better elucidated, in order to cash out their identity-in-difference. In the study's Conclusion, therefore, we try to prise open and draw conclusions from the mismatch which lingers between Hegel and Sellars. Further, we throughout try to prevent the story we have told from hardening into a positivist-empiricist reductive naïve realism, by reversing the gaze and peering at Sellars through spectacles made out of Hegelian negativity.

Let us now move on to a summary of our second key problem.

(b) *The problem of Novelty*.

If novelty and the New are defined simply as being 'different from' or 'breaking with' or 'transgressing' the already-established and the Old and the atrophied and the stale – in art, but not only in art – then we have merely achieved an indeterminate negation of the Old, of the boring finite determinacies which already exist. And, in parallel, if 'progress', or the act of surpassing the finitude of the already-given, is defined as some kind of quantitatively measurable increment on a scale of which the parameter has its upwardly mounting amounts baldly labelled as 'better' or 'more useful' or 'more enjoyable', then it will be very easy for the sceptic to dismiss the idea that there could be any kind of *absolute* (non-relativizable, or, in Kantian language, 'non-pathological') rational or political imperative to surpass what is given. The assertion of such an imperative may easily be swatted away as either a case of Panglossian daydreaming, or as

---

of the consciousness of cognitive finitude which separates the *ought* from the *is*, screaming cloyingly to be given a content and planting the root of all neurosis at the same time as that of all full-blooded freedom. The child is here constituted as an 'I' who can make promises in speech and keep them – or not – in practice, through the very identification by which she first thematizes the idea *that* – first comes to *know that* – she *is* an 'I'. This recursive-reflexive knowledge introduces an antagonistic tension: on the one hand, it is a self-fulfilling knowledge of frailty, the sting of what is neither known nor understood, and of the child's dependency upon a more or less fickle Mummy-Daddy; but, on the other hand, it propels a demand for a concrete answer to the quandary it has posed. This would be one way of trying to prevent the distinction between private and public from calcifying into an unexplained explainer.

complacently Whiggish (Victorian-teleological-eschatological) wishful thinking, or (perhaps most significantly, if it is also the most surprising) as a cheap utilitarianism caricaturable as a cybernetics of tawdry *pleasure* mortgaged to a transcendentalized model of neoliberal – Hayekian-Friedmanite – quantitative *optimization*.

Indeed, in either case – or so we will argue through our reading of Adorno's 1938 essay – the vacuous indeterminacy and merely indifferent opposition to the Old which furnishes such a definition of the New, or of the distinguishing property of the moment of surpassing, will itself be found to be overdetermined – if not frictionlessly ventriloquized – by the deceitful lure of pure immediacy installed on the level of unconscious phantasy by the real role that the quantitative scale of exchange-value has come to play in a global practico-social regime shaped by the principle of the extraction of surplus value: capitalism. If we can make this case convincingly – and Adorno's argument is complex, so we will postpone its detail until Section II – then 'indeterminacy' or 'increase' as criteria of the New will be revealed as nothing of the sort, but rather as the furtherance of the reign of the abstractly homogenizing value-form and its bad infinity.

We will suggest that the only way out of this deadlock is to recognize with Hegel that what he calls the 'good infinity' – the surpassing of the Given in the creation of something new, where the act of creation does *not* get lost in an non-completable interminable quest, failing to consolidate itself – has very little to do with quantitative difference and everything to do with *qualitative difference*, along the lines of the definition of the *logical form* of quality which Hegel gives near the beginning of his *Science of Logic*.[18] This definition states that qualitative difference is structured through the constitutive reference of a qualitative property to its opposite: hot and cold, sweet and savoury, rocky or gaseous. This unity-in-contradiction is a case in point of what Hegel calls *determinate negation*. The solution to the Problem of Novelty which we propose for scrutiny is that the New which effectuates a good infinity must be *qualitatively new*, and we suggest that the only way to understand how this might work is to recognize that it must involve another case in point of determinate negation: the production of a new *qualitative logical irreversibility* (this vocable will become unpackable only in the latter stages of the study). We cannot suppose – not without theological presupposition – that such a novelty simply erupts 'out

[18] We will make it a polemical point of honour to use the term 'logic' on the most part *not* as it is tends often to be used today, as meaning 'mathematized logic', but rather as Hegel and the German Idealists use it, to treat broadly of the discernable invariancies of the conceptual dynamic on display in any structure or process. Hegel defines logic as 'the science of things grasped by thought'. In our eyes this is helpfully complimented by Jean-Yves Girard's own recent definition: 'Logic is a mediation between rational and irrational.' (J.-Y. Girard, *La Fantôme de la transparence*, Paris: Allia, 2016, 15.)

of nowhere'. Therefore the logical principle of the excluded middle must be scrapped, and we must conclude that it is the *fecund negation* of the present shibboleths, clichés and errors, and in general of the Givens of which we are currently in *passive* receipt, which can, so to speak, make such a freshly new-baked product 'pop out of the oven': which can construct-discover new logical irreversibilities, *new contradictions*. To give a couple of quick examples, we will in Section II suggest that Ioannis Xenakis' 1954 composition *Metastasis* constructs-and-discovers a new musical contradiction by yoking the quickening of the speed of the orchestra's playing to the density of its sound, enacting a tension or antagonism between an Einsteinian marriage of mass and energy, on the one hand, and the linearity or directionality of musical succession on the other. And in Section IV we will refer to Alexandre Koyré in order to argue that Einsteinian space-time finds a novel way of articulating the antagonistic tension – the *contradiction* – between Aristotelian 'places' and the Galilean exigency of mathematization.

It seems to us that it is particularly interesting to raise the question of novelty in the contemporary setting because we have the impression that many current treatments of the issue of innovation – or of the topics of freedom and 'agency' more generally, or of what Deleuze and Guattari call 'deterritorialization': that 'good' opposed to the 'bad' in the distinction one wishes to maintain once one has, in Nietzsche's parlance, gone 'beyond good and evil' – offer *quantitative* criteria of success. Thus neo-Spinozist strands of thinking recommend the goal of '*increasing* connectivity' or '*increasing* intensity'. But if the discerning property of the *more* here targeted is not simply what 'feels good' (and we will see Adorno querying the differentiating power, and hence the pertinence, of such an index), then the question arises as to who sets its parameter, and how, and why? There are different types of connectivity and different types of intensity, and it is, furthermore, far from self-evident as to why *less* of certain species of these variables might not be suitable to freedom and surpassing.

Indeed, a full-bloodedly, inherently philosophical question is here at stake (one among several), and it revolves around the critique of classical metaphysical substance after Kant, specifically with regard to the manner in which the difference between subjectivity and objectivity is to be defined in light of this critique. We side with Hegel against Kant as regards the *effectivity* of the act of subjectivity, and so, to this degree, we have an ally in F. W. J. Schelling. Hegel and Schelling are in solidarity in affirming, against Kant, the speculative Identity of subject and object: their entwinement and co-belonging, at least of-the-last-instance. But if anthropomorphism is to be avoided, some way of distinguishing subjectivity from objectivity must be found. Interestingly, Schelling – whose metaphysics is a naturalistic one of clashing unbalanced forces – can be found declaring that the difference between subject and object is a *quantitative* one:

> Between the subject and object there is *no other difference possible than a quantitative one*... Now since it is the same absolute identity which is posited as subject and object, there is no qualitative difference.[19]

A certain dispensation in the quantitative pressure between, or dynamic amongst, objective forces is all that is needed to sufficiently discern what makes subjectivity subjectivity.

To what extent are current neo-Spinozist strands in agreement with Schelling's neo-Spinozist statement? One cannot help but think, for example, of Deleuze's influential 1962 reading of Nietzsche[20], or equally of our current moment's popular 'flat ontologies', such as those of Graham Harman and Bruno Latour. This point is, in any case, among those on which Hegel drastically parts ways with Schelling. Writes Hegel:

> That *all opposition is only quantitative* was for some time a fundamental principle of recent philosophy [...] it is one factor that *predominates* on the one side, and the other factor on the other side; on the one side, one factor, some matter or activity, is present in *greater aggregate* or in a *stronger degree* than in the other. To the extent that different materials or activities are presupposed, the quantitative difference rather confirms and completes their externality and indifference to each other and to their unity [...] [B]eing and thought, in being represented as quantitative determinations of the absolute substance, become as quanta completely external to each other, without connections, just as is the case at a lower level for carbon, nitrogen, etc.[21]

---

[19] F. W. J. Schelling, *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* (1801, 1859) in *Schellings Werke*, ed. Manfred Schröter (München, 1927), Vol. 3, 19, quoted by George di Giovanni in an editorial footnote in Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. & ed. Giovanni, Cambridge: CUP, 2010, 197 (henceforth *SL*).

[20] A couple of decades later, in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (trans. Brian Massumi, London/NY: Bloomsbury, 2004 [1980], 164, 2), we read not only that 'the real materially writes', but also that the authors aim to '*quantify writing*'. Critically scrutinizing such an aim does not necessitate rejecting the traction acquirable through the idea of deterritorialization, from which idea we indeed draw inspiration, as we do equally from Deleuze and Guattari's staunch clarion-call for a 'materialist' rehabilitation of the Absolute. The complexities of the latter emerge as central stakes in the investigation here, and a part of the response we propose is that 'materialism' must not be taken to *exclude* or rule out 'idealism'.

[21] Hegel, *SL*, 197.

Hegel insists that the difference between subject (thought, and potentially auto-telic practice) and substance (in a post-Kantian sense: objectivity) must be a *qualitative* difference. One could perhaps gloss this in a heuristically helpful way by saying that subjectivity for Hegel must be defined through *emergent properties* not possessed by the objectivity with which it is nonetheless identical in-the-last-instance. What is more, one cannot empirically put one's finger on the properties of either – phrenology having been a particularly depressing nineteenth-century attempt to do this for mind or mindedness – because, where can the split between nature and thought be registered other than *in thought*? All the more, the difference must be a 'strong' difference whereby something qualitatively new emerges[22]. For Hegel this latter is *negativity*. Negativity in Hegel's sense has nothing to do with any melancholy feelings – it is rather the power of knowing which differentiates differences. Hard is *not* soft. And negativity is, qua constructive power of knowing, *in principle* capable of *creating* new differentiations. Unlike natural causal mechanism, it is possessed of *spontaneity*, in Kant's sense of the term, meaning the 'freedom *to* self-legislate'[23]. In the shift away from Kant nonetheless carried out by Hegel this becomes the in-principle freedom *to* construct-and-discover logical necessities.[24] The movement of negativity – when successful – does not simply dismiss or corrode what is passively given to it (a first, indeterminate negation), but negates this very negation by producing a new determination which surpasses and 'sublates' (*hebt auf*) what was given (and this second step is the 'negation of the negation': determinate negation). Thus, for example, the Hegelian will say that the Cartesian-Newtonian principle of inertia is not *merely* the dismissal or corrosion of its Aristotelian

[22] Although the heuristic of 'emergence' must imperatively not be taken to metaphysically abuse any scientific conception of emergence – for example that elaborated by a theorist such as James Crutchfield – be it 'strong' or 'weak' in the technical scientific terminology. On the contrary, the Hegelian distinction here is motivated first of all through *reasoning by the absurd*.

[23] Howard Caygill, entry on 'Spontaneity' in Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, 374-376, 375. In Kantian 'spontaneity' creativity is entangled with the mere ability to be aware of anything at all *as* a thing. With respect to the latter, minimal valence of the term, Kant writes that, speaking with wide generality, '[c]oncepts are grounded on the spontaneity of thinking' (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. & ed. Guyer and Wood, Cambridge: CUP, 1998 [1781/1783] 205, A68 / B93), while Danielle Macbeth characterizes *judgement* as 'an act of spontaneity, of expressive freedom, that when successful is an exercise of reason as a power of knowing.' (Macbeth, *Realizing Reason: A Narrative of Truth and Knowing*, Oxford: OUP, 2014, 452.)

[24] This is not to imply that Hegel has *completely* abandoned the legislative paradigm.

counterpart. Maxwell's electromagnetic corkscrew is enmeshed in relations of determinate negation with the luminiferous aether which are not completely irrelevant to the later production of the theory of general relativity. Capitalism is not *simply* the corrosion or dismissal of feudalism, and the idea of communism is not *merely* the idea of the corrosion or dismissal of capitalism.

Such a stance is clearly in at least some mild danger of collapsing into – or being leveraged by – whiggish, theologizing or metaphysicalizing, eschatological teleology. The argument here presented is that this can be avoided, such as to allow Hegel's insistence upon holding Kant to his own critical standards to be carried forward, through attentive recourse to Marx and Engels (and to Lacan, who we suggest can be used to help attenuate the chronic pessimism into which some are led through Marx). It is a tenet of negation from Hegel through Marx that *alienation* is not always a dirty word, but that, on the contrary, it is the very vector of construction and discovery. But the interventions of Marx and Lacan show that for any materialist idealism or idealist materialism taking an interest in him, Hegel's '*circle of circles'*[25] of sublation and 'good infinity' can only be a self-opaque, broken circle. Practice is cognitively opaque to theory. This means – or so we would like to suggest – that the imperative of negating surpassing, for those who wish to defend such an imperative, as we do, can only with difficulty be construed as anything other than the effectuation of the Truth of the purposelessness of reason itself: of uselessness. In the latter stages of the research the question of the shortfall between the way things *ought to be* and the way things *are* is argued to be intimately tied to the question of time and temporality, and we seize upon this opportunity – kicking once again, in what we hope is a constructive fashion, against hyperkantianism – to put Hegel to work alongside Sellars. If the epistemic Given, qua affordance-for-constructive-alienation, is underdetermined in its immediate form by any other Given, then knowledge is constitutively spilt within itself by a shortfall of wrongness. Hence Truth is a negation of wrongness. Truth is wrong wrongness (in somewhat Lacanian parlance: the 'piercing of a hole' in given error *with and by a qualitatively new error*), and the act of its effectuation is the disloyal wronging of wrongness (which I would hazard could be said in French as *l'acte de faire du tort au tort*, or, at a stretch, imperatively sloganized as *tordre le tort* or nominalized as *faux faussé*).

With this overview of our problems completed, our introduction can be closed by listing, in order, the most important orienting waystations of the Sections and Chapters.

Summary of Section I

Here we offer, in Chapter 2, a discussion of François Laruelle's 'non-standard philosophy' or 'non-philosophy'. We applaud and seek to carry forward certain aspects of it, most especially: (a) Laruelle's deep critique of the classical metaphysical conception of substance, of

[25] Hegel, *Logic*, 751.

which conception Chapter 1 offers a brief history, also seeking to convince the reader that its critique remains of relevance for contemporary philosophy; and (b) his attack upon the self-sufficiency of *a posteriori* given determinacies. Chapter 2 thus studies Laruelle's important contention that the criterion for distinction between the concrete and the abstract is never simply given. We focus in particular on the question of sensation and sense-perceptible spatio-temporal determinacies – and in treating of these we employ the metaphor of 'stains' – thereby launching the negotiation between empiricism and rationalism which is decisive for the investigation as a whole.

Chapter 1 establishes some basic terminology while preparing the way for the exposition of Laruelle, and while motivating the interest of his treatment of 'stains': the terminology of the 'transcendental' and of 'universals' and 'particulars'. The universal-particular distinction is one which Laruelle *suspends*, as he *suspends* the problem of time, and so we will in Chapter 1 also take a prefatory glimpse at this problem.

Summary of Section II

Section II is composed of an extended analysis and reflection upon Theodor W. Adorno's 1938 essay 'On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening'. This essay, an early one in Adorno's trajectory, construes Freudian sublimation in music as *free* and *constructive*, picking up and exploring the occasional material of sound. In a word, if the compulsion of the Freudian drive is to be pacified by being put to work, along the lines of Orpheus, rather than momentarily extirpated and quashed in a Bacchic *passage à l'acte*, this necessarily implies both a plasticity in the occasional material and a degree of formal control of that plasticity: Kantian synthesis.

This is a rigorous *transcendentalism*, honouring not only what Kant calls the 'spontaneity' of reason (its unconditional empty freedom, its active character, and the non-reified functional definition of the 'I'), but also the disconnection of the least phenomenal crumb – including all experienced spatio-temporal determinations – from the dogmatically transparent in-itself of classical metaphysics. The stance is, at the same time, Hegelian for (among many other aspects) tying the source of *desire* to the very fact of the operativity of mediation itself; for placing the enabling conditions of this fact on the level of sociality; and for viewing music as engaged in asking meta-questions about mediation itself such that it also cannot help saying things about the shape of society in actuality. The 'culinary moments'[26] of *pleasure* are only an occurrent given piece of data to be worked on and synthesized into a cognitive meta-whole, the *truth* of which

[26] Theodor W. Adorno, 'On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening', in eds. Andrew Arato & Eike Gebhardt, *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, NY: Continuum, 1985 [1938]; 270-299, 273.

may offer very little pleasure – especially (but not only) when we move past Haydn and Mozart into the epoch of capitalist exploitation and the reign of the value-form. The 'value-form' is that socially structuring 'real abstraction' which calibrates (or constitutes or measures) abstract labour-time with homogenized exchange-value, allowing for the extraction of surplus-value to ascend to dominance as structurating principle of socio-practical form, and breeding certain phantasmagoria on the level of unconscious phantasy.

I suggest that all of this allows Adorno to avoid the pitfalls of the 'empiricist variant' of what Wilfrid Sellars calls the 'Myth of the non-categorial Given'. Indeed, he and Sellars seem to share this particular meta-principle, which Sellars sums up when he says that

> [*t*]*o reject the Myth of the Given is to reject the idea that the categorial structure of the world – if it has a categorial structure – imposes itself on the mind as a seal imposes an image on melted wax*.[27]

Let us rely at this introductory stage upon a concise outline of the critique of the empiricist variant of the Myth of the Given offered by Ray Brassier, peppered with a few of our own interpositions (we will re-sketch it again, in our own words, and by quoting Sellars further, at the appropriate moment in Section II):

> Sellars's argument is complex, but it can be briefly summarized as follows. Knowledge is of facts (that such and such is the case). Facts have propositional form (x is ϕ). The question is whether we possess the capacity to sense facts. Either the ability to sense facts of the form x is ϕ is acquired or it is unacquired. If it is acquired, then it is not a sensory capacity, since by hypothesis [– that is, by a naturalistic hypothesis tending to be shared by empiricists –], the ability to sense sense contents is unacquired [i.e., innate]. So the ability to sense facts must be unacquired [otherwise, it would not involve *sensing*]. But if facts can be sensed, then sensation must have propositional form. To say that we sense facts is to say that sensation mirrors a reality already endowed with propositional form. But propositional form is tantamount to intelligible order. How then are we to explain the congruence between sensible order and intelligible order? If the ability to sense facts is unacquired, it cannot be explained naturalistically in terms of evolution by natural selection

[27] Wilfrid Sellars, 'Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process. The Carus Lectures of Wilfrid Sellars', *The Monist* 64 (1) 1981: 3-90, I. §45. Available online at: http://www.ditext.com/sellars/carus200.html.

> [because in a behaviourist optic evolution by natural selection *is* a form of *acquisition* differentiating species within the same genus]. Thus the congruence between sensible order and intelligible order must either be left unexplained or explained by invoking supernatural factors.[28]

Rebuffing the unmotivated defeatism of giving up on explanation, and swatting aside the fideism implied in supernatural explanation, Sellars therefore refuses that any actuality – any thing or state of affairs – could be cognitively auto-unveiling, where such a 'self-presentingness of a state of affairs […] [would be] defined, at least in part, in terms of the "evidentness" or "warrantedness" of the belief that it obtains.'[29] We must rather accept conceptual mediation – which Sellars views as passing by acts of speech and batteries of inferential commitments – as the condition of all 'givenness-to' self-consciousness, and must therefore accept an opacity and underdetermination between thing and thought. There are two crucial facets of Sellars' arguments which need to be stressed by way of preparation. Firstly, for Sellars intentionality must be explanatorily derived, as a *result*, from processes preceding it which were not metaphysically guaranteed to produce it. An implication of this – harbouring a striking resonance with Lacan, if not also with Derrida – is that consciousness cannot be taken to directly entail self-consciousness. Knowing something is not automatically *knowing that you know* it. There is no logical inconsistency in postulating that people can do all manner of things – including uttering speeches – without *knowing that* they are doing those things. To give another example, people can sneeze without *knowing that* they are sneezing: 'to sense bluely is no more to be aware of something *as* blue (roughly: that something is blue) than to breath sneezbily is to be aware of something as a sneeze'[30].

This quotation leads us to the second facet we wish to prefatorily foreground: the *adverbial* theory of sensation. If sneezing, qua behaviour or happening, can be defined as breathing sneezbily, Sellars also adheres to the contention that sensing, qua behavior or happening, must equally be understood to involve modifications of the *functional state* of the organism's faculty of sensibility (one may – *or may not*, for fear of positivist reification – wish to say, of their neurophysiology: of their nervous system). The importance of this idea should not

---

[28] Ray Brassier, 'Nominalism, Naturalism, and Materialism: Sellars's Critical Ontology' in eds. Bana Bashour & Hans D. Muller, *Contemporary Philosophical Naturalism and Its Implications*, NY/London: Routledge, 2014.

[29] Sellars, FMPP I, §140.

[30] Sellars, FMPP I, §152.

be underestimated, and it is, as a matter of fact, profoundly Hegelian. Kant polarizes a sharp distinction between the *passive* 'receptivity' of sensation and the *active* 'spontaneity' accruing to reason. But this leads him to reel in dismay before the complexity, or even the mystery, of the schematism of isomorphism-mapping-and-plotting which must be obliquely in effect such that concepts can in fact be non-trivially guided and constrained in their work of subsuming (or 'determining') data in the manifold of sense (which manifold is shaped or structured by the pure a priori *forms* of intuition, with their unhinged status of contingent conditionality). Furthermore, the diremption of passivity and activity exacerbates and seals the unknowability of the things-in-themselves, while, question-beggingly, Kant maintains that intuition plays a non-trivial role in guiding and constraining what is to be affirmed as the *real and effective knowledge* that is the knowledge of the appearances.

Both Sellars and Hegel reject this sharp diremption, which for them loses Truth to the meagre self-deceit of its '*as if*'.[31] Sellars' adverbial strategy therefore involves cutting across and effacing this line of demarcation by attributing *activeness* not only to the productive imagination but also to the sensibility as such.

Consider a musical note of the pitch *b flat*. For the sake of the point to be made, let us assume we have already shipped on board the goal of parrying the empiricist Myth of the Given wherever it springs up. The natural science of physics suggests that the sounding of the musical note happens through agitations in the air: soundwaves. However this sounding may or may not in fact happen, if one were to claim that *b flat* has always been 'out there' in nature, pre-given, and simply waiting for a human being to, so to speak, bump into it such that it could then auto-unveil itself to the passively receptive faculty of that human, this – so Sellars will claim – would be bizarre. If we work with the model of the soundwave, *b flat* can hardly be said to be present preformed as such in nature, because the gradation of lengths of waves is an infinitesimally 'smooth' continuum and any sonic situation will feature a great many irregular waves mashed together. Thus saliency relations between pitches, calibrated through stipulated parameters and

[31] Writes Hegel in the Introduction to his *Logic* (25, my interposition):

> Turned against reason, this understanding [Kant's reflective power of judgement] behaves in the manner of *ordinary common sense*, giving credence to the latter's view that truth rests on sensuous reality, that thoughts are *only* thoughts, that is, that only sense perception gives filling and reality to them; that reason, in so far as it abides in and for itself, generates only mental figments. In this self-renunciation of reason the concept of truth is lost, is restricted to the knowledge of mere subjective truth, of mere appearances, of only something to which the nature of the fact does not correspond; *knowledge* had lapsed into *opinion*.

formulae or ratios of schematization, can only obtain insofar as they have been *constructed* – as opposed to given –, *imposing* an ordering upon the non-pre-ordered sonority.[32] As regards *b flat*, this is precisely what happened when the western pitch system was formalized (equally, some such transcendental calibration may have occurred in and through the pitch-discretization shaping the calls of whales and dolphins). If we do *not* work with the model of soundwaves, perhaps wishing to side with Heidegger on the matter[33], then the claim for the *passive* reception of *b flat* may well fall to the Myth in more obvious ways. Furthermore, it is indeed hard to see how the *Kantian* could hope to articulate passivity with activity without recourse to *Heidegger's* reading of Kantian intuition.

Sellars therefore sees the sensibility as itself *active* and already structured by parameters, formulae, ratios, and saliency relations which are non-natural, in the sense of malleable and transformable, such that the natural heteronomy of the sonic material is, at least *in potentia*, plastically manipulable by auto-telic decisions 'reaching back' to it from their decisional source in the faculty of reason.

Without equating or collapsing together the two cases, it may be said then that, from a Sellarsian vantage, *b flat* can only have been *constructed* in and through human practices, just as 'sensing bluely' is a functional state of the sensibility[34] – conceived to be like a motor which is

---

[32] On these matters, see Inigo Wilkins, *Irreversible Noise: The Rationalisation of Randomness and the Fetishisation of Indeterminacy*, unpublished PhD thesis, Goldsmiths University of London, 2015; forthcoming as a monograph, Falmouth: Urbanomic.

[33] Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, 31-35.

[34] Sellars aims to de-positivise and de-reify 'sense-impressions', being unhappy that they should enjoy an ontological dignity which he views as unearned and which would stop them from being cognitive thought-episodes. He conducts a thought experiment (the 'myth of Jones') in which 'genius Jones' is the first human ever to come up with a theoretical account of *inner* psychological episodes, breaking with the behaviourist account which 'our Rylean ancestors' had up until that point employed. As part of this theory, Jones elaborates, 'in crude and sketchy form', a theory positing entities that are inner episodes called *impressions*, and which posited as 'the end results of the impingement of physical objects and processes on various parts of the body'. Articulating the adverbial theory and the critique of the Myth of the empiricist Given, Sellars says of Jones' new posit that

> The entities introduced by the theory are *states* of the perceiving subject, *not a class of particulars*. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the particulars of the common sense world are such things as books, pages, turnips, dogs, persons, noises, flashes, etc., and the Space and Time – Kant's *Undinge* – in which they come to be.

constantly ticking over and firing off (i.e., conceived as *active*) – a state which I can only *know as* an instance of my perceiving something *as* blue because self-conscious perception, the 'taking' of the given, is itself shaped by non-natural, transformable calibrations. But what is most interesting is that 'active' here *does not always mean* 'rationally decided-upon by self-consciousness': the activity of the sensibility can be altogether 'acephalic' and non-auto-reflexively-deliberated. Thus Sellars splits *activity* itself onto non-self-conscious and self-conscious levels (the latter alone meriting the full-blooded name of 'spontaneity'). We will have occasion to hint at the manner in which this move is paralleled in Lacan.

Such is a sketch of the critique of the *empiricist variant* of the Myth of the Given. However, Sellars also writes that

> [m]any things have been said to be 'given': sense contents, material objects, universals, propositions, real connections, first

(Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', in *Science, Perception and Reality*, Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1991, 129-194, 178, 190.)

In other words, thinking-episodes-in-themselves should not be construed on any hard-and-fast analogy with such happenstances as with which we are familiar in our everyday perceptual experience:

> we can 'hear ourselves think', but the verbal imagery which enables us to do this is no more the thinking itself than is the overt verbal behaviour by which it is expressed and communicated to others. It is a mistake to suppose that we must be having verbal imagery – indeed, any imagery – when we 'know what we are thinking' – in short to suppose that 'privileged access' must be construed on a perceptual or quasi-perceptual model. (*Ibid.*, 178.)

Elsewhere Sellars comments that a 'map' is at best a convenient metaphor for full-bloodedly signifying thought-determinacies, because maps are made of marks which are particulars, on paper which is a particular, whereas full-bloodedly signifying thought-determinacies cannot be said to be particulars. He continues in this connection that

> One is reminded of the thesis, attributed in a polemical spirit to representative theories of perception, according to which one sees objects by seeing objects which represent those objects. Somewhat closer to home, one is also reminded of the view that the brain thinks by producing and deciphering neuro-physiological brain-language tokens. (Sellars, *Naturalism and Ontology*, Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1996 [1979], 106.)

Jumping ahead, a wellspring of an interest in Hegel can here be quite clearly seen cropping up for the reader of Sellars, in that thought-determinacies are detached from *causal being*, and so one may conclude that they will need to be attributed to *non-being*.

> principles, even givenness itself. [...] Often what is attacked under its name are only specific varieties of 'given'. Intuited first principles and synthetic necessary connections were the first to come under attack. And many who today [1956] attack 'the whole idea of givenness' – and they are an increasing number – are really only attacking sense data. For they transfer to other items, say physical objects or relations of appearing, the characteristic features of the 'given'.[35]

So, when Adorno in 1938 suggests – as we will see that he does – that exchange-value chokes and blocks transcendental synthesis *from outside of its functioning*, does he not contradict himself? Use-values (the means to ends which are worth pursuing) are – I argue – not the type of 'thing' which could be hidden from us behind the obstruction of a 'screen'. This is the wrong metaphor, because the material of sublimation is *nothing other than mediation itself*. In spite of himself, Adorno ends up, in the essay which we will study, aligning *pleasure* with use-value, and later on (– although this is, admittedly, a more complex and tenuous complaint –) *non-identity* with an outside of mediation which can nonetheless reach a tentacle into it. In the swingeing pessimism of this moment Adorno arguably falls for the 'intellectualist variant' of the Myth of the Given.

In Section III we will see that Badiou borrows the Moebius strip from Lacan to illustrate that the outside of the given is already its inside, and vice versa. But if so, the task set is that of working hard to map in which ways mediation – including the mediation that is the commodity-form – is *opaque* to self-consciousness, and, along with this task, is set also that of articulating the normative-conceptual with the causal. The 'optimistic' conclusion which we propose to draw here is that nothing prevents the meta-question of the *fetishization of novelty* from being treated *by art itself*.

But this is not to imply that there is no tension or mismatch between Hegel and Sellars. Hence as we move into Section III our motivation will be that of pushing this problematic towards the question of cognitive progress more generally, and in the back of our head there will be two speculative piques of curiosity, both prowling the faultlines of the study's two key problems (those of the problem of the *ought* and the problem of Novelty):

- Successional temporality is the medium of music. However, if *successional time* is, *pace* Bergson, not an in-itself but rather, as Hegel claims, an *effect of mediation*, how does the *knowledge of* temporalities (musical; non-linear; historical-'ruptural', *à la* Althusser or

[35] Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', in *Science, Perception and Reality*, 129. My interposition.

Bachelard; Boltzmannian-thermodynamic) kick back onto the process of mediation? How does this play into the question of freedom?

- Could Sellars be fully Hegelianised?
    - For Sellars (as will be sketched immediately below), concepts are individuated through the *rule-bound* roles they play. But if, with Hegel, what is actual to the highest degree is the movement of self-negating negativity, can the autonomy, or relative autonomy, of the normative be 'plugged into' this movement directly? Or does the gap which remains between *Wirklich* actuality and self-conscious knowledge reinforce the opacity whereby the normative is, in-the-first-instance, completely unhinged from the causal?
    - Sellars arguably draws the very distinction between, on the one hand, *erroneous mere appearance* and, on the other, *reality-or-truth*, between what he calls the 'Manifest' and the 'Scientific' 'Images' of man-in-the-world. The Manifest Image is

> the framework in terms of which man came to be aware of himself as man-in-the-world. It is the framework in terms of which, to use an existentialist turn of phrase, man first encountered himself – which is, of course, when he came to be man

plus 'something like the canons of inductive inference defined by John Stuart Mill, supplemented by canons of statistical inference'[36]. The Scientific Image is that conception 'which postulates imperceptible objects and events for the purpose of explaining correlations among perceptibles'[37]. However, for Hegel, it seems that the *appearance/reality* distinction must rather be drawn twice, once in the heart of the *a posteriori* given, factial phenomenon, and then again in the heart of the speculatively constructed discourse which aims to speak of the noumenon. Hence, in Hegel, it seems that speculation must pay attention to the natural sciences, but that not all speculation is natural-scientific, and that Truth

[36] Sellars, 'Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man' in Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality*, Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1991 [1963], 7-43, 11, 12.

[37] *Ibid.*, 23.

qua determinate negation may pertain to zones far removed from the natural sciences.

Before moving on to summarize Section III, one further set of preparatory distinctions must be established, because here in Section II we will have caught sight of that aforementioned, broadly Kantian tenet of Sellars's whereby he understands concepts as *rules*. To clear the way for this, let us distinguish three relevant valences of the word *rule* insofar as, in Kant and Sellars, a rule can be said to be what a concept *is.* These three valences in fact constitute three different designations of the term, to which – I suggest – one should do one's best to be sensitive and which should, in the first instance, not be conflated.

1.) <u>*Rules for, in, or through syntheses of sensible intuitions.*</u> Béatrice Longuenesse provides an invaluable exegesis of our first two notions of the 'rule-concept' as they occur in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Her definition of the first meaning of the term has it that '[t]he concept is a rule insofar as it is the consciousness of the unity of an act of sensible synthesis or the consciousness of the procedure for generating a sensible intuition.'[38] Simply put, knowing *what something is* involves knowing *how to* conjure it up, construct it, or *say* what it is. This is closely related to what Kant calls a *schema*. Writes Kant: 'The schema of the triangle can never exist anywhere except in thought, and signifies a rule of the synthesis of the imagination with regard to pure shapes in space'. Equally, an empirical concept such as that of a dog 'is always related immediately to the schema of the imagination, as a rule for the determination of our intuition in accordance with a certain general concept.'[39] It seems to me imperative to bear in mind the ways in which this meaning of *rule* is *not* identical to either of the following two. As far as I can see it is this very function which Hegel, as our Conclusion shall suggest, will 'beef up' – *without* substantializing it – into what he calls the Law inherent to the thing, or 'essence'. The polemical tenor of our own argument is that in this sense of a rule, or a Law, chaos has a rule-Law, noise has a rule-Law, and different types of irregularity or dissemination have different types of rule-Laws.

[38] Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, 50.

[39] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. & eds. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: CUP, 1998, A141/B180, 273.

2.) *Discursive 'rules for subsumption'.* The second sense in which a concept can be seen to be a rule is that a concept provides a *reason* for predicating of an intuited object the 'marks' that define the concept:

> Every concept is a *rule* insofar as its explication (e.g., a body is extended, limited in space and impenetrable) can function as the major premise in a syllogism whose conclusion would be the attribution of the marks belonging to this concept to an object of sensible intuition.[40]

To draw the conclusion of such a syllogism is, in Kant's lexicon, to 'determine' the object (or to 'subsume' the intuition).

3.) *Rules as prescriptive practical 'ought-to-dos' which can be either observed or flouted.* Finally, this is a valence which has tended to be neglected by Kant commentators, but one which it is among Sellars's (and Brandom's) merits to have brought to the fore. Without it – or without some other account breaking the Old pre-established clarity-and-distinctness between thought and nature – I avow that I struggle to see how the radicality of Kant's break with, say, Descartes, could be appreciated. Here is Ruth Milikan's synopsis of this third Sellarsian facet of the *rule*:

> Conceptual roles, for Sellars, (as for Quine) were internalized patterns of linguistic response, responses to the world with words, responses to words with more words, and responses to words with overt actions. These patterns were not merely patterns in fact, however, [not merely] patterns actually engaged in by thinkers, speakers and hearers. Sellars took linguistic rules to be normative rather than merely descriptive of regularities. Moreover, they were normative in a very strong prescriptive or evaluative sense. He was fond of saying that these rules were 'fraught with ought'. They prescribed regularities rather than merely describing them. He also compared these rules to the rules of a game (such as chess) in which conventionally allowable moves are made, the outcomes of which get counted, in accordance with further conventions, as having certain results. (Moving your rook to make that kind of configuration counts as putting my king in check.) His understanding of linguistic rules thus made contact with theories of speech acts that take

[40] Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, 50.

> these to be wholly conventional in the sense that acts of this sort could not be performed at all were there no conventions for performing them. The relevant norms are essentially social in origin and function.[41]

Summary of Section III

Chapters 5 and 6 give a focused account of some core Hegelian concepts and distinctions:

- *limits vs. boundaries*, a distinction traced from Kant into Hegel in Chapter 5;
- then in Chapter 6:
    - *the good and bad infinities*;
    - *non-being*;
    - the '*negation of the negation*';
    - the formal shape of *qualitative difference*;
    - the '*for-itself*' (in French, the *pour-soi*): a determination's auto-affirmation of itself through its concrete mediation with its Other;
    - and – with the help of Gérard Lebrun – the semantic (but – a question to be worried away at – is it only semantic?) *unity-of-opposites*, focusing on the cases of the Positive and the Negative, and of Identity and Non-Identity.

Chapter 6 proceeds through a reading of passages from near the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*. We examine a penetrating critical commentary of this part of the *Logic* provided by Alain Badiou in his book *Being and Event*, a commentary which accuses Hegel of fetishizing *continuity* and givenness. We defend Hegel against these charges, but accept that Badiou's criticism contains salutary elements, and that it is highly consequential for any properly cautious interpretation of Hegel, most notably in its insistence upon the intelligibility of indifferent indiscernibility – in a sort of exterior 'in-between' of those discernible qualities which are mutually mediated through *interior* differences – but also in its concomitant insistence upon the non-linear, ruptural character of construction and discovery.

Summary of Section IV

This final Section presents those results of the research which pertain in a general fashion to cognitive self-surpassing. It does this by putting Sellars and Hegel to work in tandem in order to ask the question of the coherency or salvageability of the notion of 'progress'.

Chapter 7 tackles issues regarding time and temporality, arguing that time should not be treated as a substance. Rather, different registers of temporality should be understood as inherent

[41] Ruth Millikan, 'The Father, The Son and the Daughter: Sellars, Brandom and Milikan', 2005, https://philosophy.uconn.edu/faculty/millikan/#, 2.

to different forms of *mediation*. This means that there is a temporality – a time – specific to *knowledge* which is autonomous and irreducible. We do not touch upon it at any length, but it seems appropriate to mention that the use here of Sellars and Hegel (and also of Marx) is inspired by Bachelard, Althusser, and Badiou. It seems necessary then to hereby acknowledge that our affirmation of resources *in Hegel* which are of value to the mission which these thinkers importantly pursue is intended as a polemical intervention *against* their own dismissal of him, which we take to be peremptory. In the case of Bachelard this will in fact be explicitly argued in Chapter 8, in the subsection entitled 'The dialectics of inside and outside against the structural thematics of envelopment'.

Chapter 8, the decisive chapter for the study as a whole, indeed argues for an approach to natural-scientific knowledge and mathematical knowledge which would be at one and the same time dialectical – in a full-bloodedly conceptual sense of the term – and historical materialist – in a full-bloodedly materialist sense of the term.

Indeed, our contention is that materialism must be, in a sense to be carefully unpacked, idealist, while idealism must be materialist. The chapter beings by carrying out a critical reading of some of W. V. O. Quine's proposals regarding epistemic holism and the articulation of ontology and epistemology. We applaud his principle of the underdetermination of scientific theory-building by empirical evidence, and his concomitant dismissal of what Imre Lakatos calls 'naïve falsificationism'. However, we argue that his reliance upon criteria of success for scientific theorization rooted in utilitarian or navigational notions of 'usefulness' and *prediction* undermines his wish to uphold the Truth of science, and loses all traction upon any real that could, in any sense, claim to be Absolute (effectuating an absolute concrete movement of construction-discovery), rather than merely relative and arbitrary.

The tension and momentum of this reading pushes us to press on to study Lakatos' 1970 essay 'Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes'. Lakatos – through his brand of 'sophisticated falsificationism' – maintains that success in theory-building, if its truth is to be absolutizable, must be gauged through the *production of new facts*. We salute Lakatos's profoundly perspicacious affirmation of the imperative to surpass – and especially the crucial role of logical *inconsistency* therein – but argue that his strategy for cashing out this affirmation risks falling back upon the presupposition of a positive transparency between thought and nature, to the precise extent that it risks fetishizing *production itself* and thereby problematically presupposing that *progress is quantifiable*. Lakatos's nods to Hegel are leveraged in order to claim that the marriage of truth to *untrammeled self-relating negativity* is the only move fit to carry forwards Lakatos's own best insights.

In order to delineate more concretely how the danger of positivizing and substantializing novelty might be parried, we proceed to undertake a relatively detailed study of Sellars's Wittgenstein-inspired theory of 'picturing', and of his functional-role semantics, which together

add up to his defense of a 'metalinguistic' nominalism (all of these technical terms will be defined and explained). We argue that the importance of Sellars' intervention is that it offers a *realism of the act* which retains the opaque determination of thought (self-consciousness) by non-thought (*non-self-conscious* socially-conditioned practice – which, in an only slightly simplified Marxian unpacking, means *unconscious and utterly irreflectively oblivious* socially conditioned practice), *without* relying on any Kantian dualism which would undialectically hold thought and thing in a crypto-metaphysical separation.

However, as with any brand of nominalism, we have to dodge the pitfall of being seduced by a *sensualist* reification of the perceptible properties of *words*: of sonorous utterances and written inscriptions. This is side-stepped by severing Wittgenstein's continuum between real-world 'facts' and linguistic statements with a scalpel of negativity separating propositional form in the conceptual order from the natural order's non-propositional structure. It is argued that even sense-perceptibles – even in the Truth whereby we take them to be thus and so, rather than otherwise – must been seen to be constitutively shot through with negativity: permeated by 'wrongness', the falsity that is a moment of the true.

This is seized upon as the most opportune moment to tackle the problem of the *ought*, in the most honestly problematizing and open-minded fashion we can muster, both through what Hegel says about it, and in what seems to be a promising materialist immanentization of the *ought* by way of a possible solution through Sellars.

The remainder of Chapter 8 seeks to cash out this discussion by bringing it to bear upon the question of the imperative to surpassing in the natural sciences and mathematics. An engagement with Bachelard's *The Philosophy of No* (1940) and his book-chapter on 'The Dialectics of Outside and Inside' (from 1957's *The Poetics of Space*) allows us to argue that the problematic of *representation* can be salvaged from that Mythical Givenness for tarnishment with which poststructuralism has tended to dismiss it, *if* the *negativity of decision* is embraced as being – at least in principle – productive in a non-predictable and non-linear manner.

From here we speed up the pace of our presentation in order to harvest, in a relatively small space, the maximum number of resulting theorems and fresh avenues of interrogation off the back of the propositions thus far argued. The doctrine of historical materialism – contended to involve a carrying forward of the desubstantializing vector of the Hegelian dialectic – now comes to the fore, and Marx and Engels are used in somewhat polemical terms to defend a historiography of the natural sciences rejecting not only the reductive or obstructive reification of cherrypicked scraps of the historical record, but also the reification in a merely juxtapositional mutual exteriority of incompatible paradigms, whereby they would be viewed as simply 'incommensurable'. We acknowledge the salience on one level of Thomas Kuhn's account of incommensurability, but argue – through a reading of Alexandre Koyré's 1955 essay on the 'Influence of Philosophic Trends on the Formulation of Scientific Theories' – that what is needed,

if any non-relativisable truth can be said to be found in physics, is a historiography of full-blooded *antagonistic conceptual contradiction*.

Finally, we circle back around to some of the issues regarding mathematics which were raised through the discussions of Badiou and Laruelle in Sections II and I. We cite Albert Lautman by way of setting out what we judge to have emerged as a crucial question in this domain: that of the non-tautological ampliativeness which must be insisted upon in the historicity of mathematics if the latter is not to be reduced to a neighbourhood of formal logic, lacking in surprises. Registering the extreme difficultly implied in trying to affirm and celebrate discovery in pure and applied mathematics *without aestheticizing* isolated moments amongst their procedures, we try to put to work insights gained in Section II in the clash between Hegel and Badiou. It is suggested that the formal shape of qualitative difference can be picked up from Hegel, as well as a non-representational inflection of the dialectics of 'indifferent' exteriority and 'noumenal' interiority, in order to construe discovery in pure mathematics as a moment wherein forms qua forms reveal or 'flip over into' qualitative relational properties which were non-apparent and non-predictable, as well as non-discoverable save through the mathematical procedure of axiomatizing construction. These formal but qualitatively differentiated properties emerging through the relational mediation of forms with forms can be called the *content* of mathematical discovery.

The goal here is to say something of interest to the important furtherance of the mission shared by Lautman and his contemporary Jean Cavaillès: the mission of understanding mathematical truth as neither arbitrary nor relativizable – as, in a sense, Absolute.

However, the 'materialist' cast of our historical materialism (and of our materialist idealism, or our idealist materialism) obliges us to critically scrutinize and quibble with the uses of Heidegger and Spinoza suggested, albeit experimentally, by Lautman and Cavaillès. Can we not uphold the absoluteness of mathematical truth, *and at the same time* the constructedness of mathematical entities, whereby they are not ontologically separate from the concept-mongering act which builds them? And can we do this by following Sellars' heteroclite Platonism of invariancies?

Section IV closes by reviewing two examples given by Hegel in his discussion of the mathematical infinite, wherein the stress is put by him on the actuality in mathematics of *completed* infinities, as opposed to interminable series. This is the bridge into the study's Conclusion. The problem of the *ought* as it has by this point transmogrified itself is zeroed in on as the question – *prima facie* paradoxical – as to whether the 'Law' inherent to the thing in-and-for-itself can be forced to let itself be known by us other than through the disjunction whereby an *exterior* and, in-the-first-instance, *arbitrary* norm allows us to reconstruct the way the thing *seems to be*.

But the precise valences of the term *norm* and of the *ought* have shown themselves through the investigation to be in need of being differentiated and more precisely pinned down.

We attempt to indicate a limitation of Sellars's regarding where the province or provinces of Truth are located. The Problem of Novelty leads us to some closing reflections regarding time and temporality, incompleteness and completeness, exteriority and interiority, and use and uselessness.

Section I
Hyperkantianism

Chapter 1
The Stain between Impression and Substance: a History

'Stains' can serve as a metaphor for the role allotted to *meaninglessness* not only by partisans of the deterritorializing force of 'brute matter', but also by diagnosers of symbolic incompleteness. For both, the blindspot that will lead to the disturbance of a given regime of meaning often must be determined through a smear or glitch which that regime cannot sublate: the mark of a Real stripped of systematizing mediation. However, the argument of this opening Section of our study will be that it is all too easy to allow the stringency of this Real to be undermined by the inflation in its name of merely contingent empirical instances.

To this end, Chapter 2 will investigate François Laruelle's claim that such blockages to theoretical and artistic practice can be removed with the aid of an articulation of incompleteness and inconsistency implied by his conception of the Real as non-consistent but *hyper*complete 'radical immanence'. *À rebours* of Laruelle himself, it will be suggested that *different types* of meaninglessness can then be distinguished, de-metaphorized, and conceptualized as *qualitatively differentiable* 'noise'.

Why foreground meaninglessness as an opening gambit for the study? Because, arguably, three types of it loom large since the break with classical metaphysical rationalism: meaninglessness as genetically primitive ground of meanings (David Hume); meaninglessness as excessive overspilling of the sterility of meanings (Henri Bergson, and, at certain points, the Gilles Deleuze of 1968's *Difference and Repetition*); and meaninglessness as the empty gap of the incompleteness of meanings (Slavoj Žižek). Gains won in the drawing of these distinctions have led to losses elsewhere. Namely, on the one hand, in the stifling of the question of the role of visible or audible spatio-temporal forms – such as in Stockhausen's music or in the bristles of Philip Guston's paintbrush, or Goya's – and of our desire for them qua asignifying. And, on the other hand, in the stifling of the question of what specific relations may obtain between *different types* of meaninglessness or purported 'formlessness' and *different types* of meaning – within any one of, or cutting across, the three categories.

In Chapter 2 we will argue that, by upping the ante of the competition to strip away conditionality from the Real, François Laruelle's 'non-standard philosophy' helps us to better reformulate these non-trivial open questions.

However, in order to launch our investigation as a whole, it is necessary first of all to conduct a brief prefatory historical survey, here in Chapter 1, of two problems and a crux. Firstly, we will review a problem regarding Hume's 'sense-impressions' and the classical metaphysical conception of 'substance'; secondly, a full-bloodedly speculative problem emerging between Bergson and Deleuze regarding the link, or lack thereof, between the infinitesimal vibrations of sensation and the dividing line between the possible and the impossible; and, finally, a crux reached at the point where meaninglessness is purified by Žižek so as to become a kind of 'void'.

By fleshing out these three moments some essential philosophical touchstones are established, and a springboard is provided for a relatively snappy exposition, in Chapter 2, of Laruelle's highly original reworking of Kant's thing-in-itself, with further Kantian landmarks thereby being mapped. The argument will be that Laruelle allows us – somewhat against the grain of his own commitments – to shake off the shackles of our crux, such as to prize open and multiply our questions in a way that is newly fruitful, albeit ragged. The issue of meaninglessness in art will be foregrounded through a brief discussion of two video works by Amanda Beech, and we will suggest that if something like a 'desire-for-the-stain' constitutes a pertinent artistic drive, this drive should be untethered from an exclusive marriage to any supposed 'sheer sensation', in order to avoid suppressing art's capacity for conceptual discovery.

A hint of what Laruelle will do with the stain may be given before we launch into our historical survey by citing – for now cryptically – his use of the geometrical figure of the fractal, a pattern (scribble or regular polygon) reiterated self-similarly so as to take on unexpected complex properties as it scales up. Leaving hanging a quotation or two may give a sense of Laruelle's scrambling of the philosophical registers of 'concrete' and 'abstract', a crucial de-reification which we will salute and try to unpack in Chapter 2: '[F]ractality is not only in the World, it is just as much in your head and your eye'[42], which is said to make possible

> a fractal practice of philosophy at the same time as a 'de-intuitivation' of the fractal itself; and an ontological or real use of the fractal extended beyond physical or geometrical intuitivity at the same time as a refusal of the metaphorical use to which a 'fractal vision of the world' inevitably leads.[43]

1. *The problem of sense-impressions and auto-intelligible substance*

1.1. *Hume's 'impressions' and the triangle-in-general*

Hume's empiricism makes of sense-impressions – the raw data impinging upon sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell – the primitive building-blocks of the theory dealing with the possibility and acquisition of knowledge. We will sketch first of all a certain *reading* of Hume's argument associated with the Kantian 'critical' current – for this is the tradition which Laruelle will seek to push to its *n*-th degree.

---

[42] François Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, trans. Robin Mackay, Falmouth/NY: Urbanomic/Sequence, 2011, 131.

[43] *Ibid.*, 140.

This Kantian critical reading is sympathetic to Hume's goal of striking a blow against idle metaphysical speculation by refuting its question-begging positing of a purely spiritual faculty of mind capable of acceding to 'refined perceptions'[44] from some ethereal realm. Indeed, Kant was himself spurred into his critical project by Hume's trenchant blotting out of the assumption of a crystal-clear window through which ideas could be matched with reality, and legitimate belief sorted from illegitimate fantasy, without any need to coordinate the idea in question with other ideas. It is seen as entirely fair and just that Hume should take umbrage with Descartes' claim that our capacity to form an idea, for example, of the abstract essence of the triangular-shape-in-general, a generality detached from any particular triangles we have in fact seen drawn in chalk on blackboards, is accounted for *simply* by the fact that upon introspection it appears to us 'clearly and distinctly' that contained in the idea of a triangle are the properties of having three sides and angles adding up to 180°. As Hume notes, these are purely formal, non-sensible determinations, such that this triangular-shape-in-general is 'neither isosceles nor scalenum, nor […] confined to any particular length and proportion of sides'[45], and yet the classical rationalist will maintain that these constraints are *objective*. For Hume this recourse to apparent logical-geometrical clarity and distinctness is nothing other than woeful obscurity, because the genesis of the knowledge in question remains obfuscated.

However, on the Kantian-critical reading the worry regarding Hume's attack is that, in order to 'destroy this artifice' by means of which philosophers are wont to 'cover many of their absurdities'[46], he may have been obliged to presuppose that the sense-impressions in question – those accounting for the genesis of ideas – are able to reveal and transmit *their own* content, directly and – as it were – of their own accord, without the aid of any mediating structures, *to* the mind's system of ideas. If '*all our ideas are copied from our impressions*'[47] – 'impressions' presumably being a certain species of spatio-temporal, qualitatively differentiated forms – and if impressions and ideas are distinguished only in 'the degrees of force and liveliness with which they strike upon the mind'[48], then the question of how exactly 'force and liveliness' allow the

[44] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, excerpted in ed. Isaiah Berlin, *The Age of Enlightenment*, NY: Mentor, 1956, 183.

[45] *Ibid.*

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] *Ibid.*, 167.

impression to cross the threshold from meaningless physicality to cognitive intelligibility is now puzzling. It may be that Hume here requires – against his own explicit commitments – the assumption of certain aspects of the classical metaphysical characterization of *substance*. A historical detour regarding substance is hence worth the trouble.

1.2. *'Substance' from Aristotle to Spinoza*

In his *Categories*, Aristotle defines substances as individual bodies, these individual bodies being the ultimate bearers of linguistic predication, such as themselves to not be sayable of anything else[49]. He gives the examples of 'man' and 'horse'. Let us consider the horse Red Rum, who is fast and reddish-brown. Neither 'fast' nor 'reddish-brown' are substances, for they require attribution to something else, namely the particular horse Red Rum. Not even 'horse', it turns out, meets the stringent criteria of 'that which is called a substance most strictly, primarily, and most of all'[50], because 'horse' is a *species* and so requires individual instances of horses of which it can be predicated. According to this key strut of the classical definition, Red Rum is a *primary substance* only as a strictly individual body, in the very coincidence of his flesh and blood with itself. Substance is therefore that which is *identical to itself*. In Aristotle's *Metaphysics* a certain nuance is added: the *matter* of living tissue (or stone for a house, or fire for a flame) is distinguished from its essential *form*, and it is this latter which takes the role of substance qua subject of predication and change (change being another parameter given in the *Categories*), without which it would be impossible for any of the thing's attributes to exist. This remains a guiding thread throughout the Medieval scholastic philosophy: substance is able to furnish the explanation of why a horse runs, neighs, and seeks nourishment insofar as the identity-to-self of the animal's substantial form causally guarantees that these goals have been added to the otherwise mechanically law-bound material stuff from which the horse is constituted.

In the seventeenth century Spinoza breaks with the scholastic tradition, but he does so precisely by rendering explicit and elucidating a tacit presupposition which had, arguably, been present since Aristotle. It transpires that substance is that which contains within itself both its own cause and, by the same token, the capacity to intelligibly auto-unveil its own form and properties to the philosopher. Rejecting the unexplained teleological explainer of a substantial form-essence for every organic species and empirical thing, Spinoza assimilates their goals and functions

---

[49] Aristotle, *Categories and De Interpretatione*, trans. J. L. Ackrill, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963, 2a11.

[50] *Ibid.*

seamlessly into the causal order of matter. A 'substance' is now that and only that 'which is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed.'[51] The consequence is that there is *only one* substance, because there can be only one self-caused cause of the totality of all those non-substantial things (phones; ink blots; sodium chloride; the concept of finitude) which need to be conceived through something other than themselves (a compuction to communication; a leaky pen; electrostatic attraction; distinguishment from the concept of infinity).

As we hope will become clear, Laruelle can be viewed as pressing this collapse of substance to a certain extreme terminus – but only if we note that he will seek to rend asunder the short-circuit of transparent reciprocity between ideal thought (justified understanding) and real thing (material causality) upon which we clearly see that Spinoza relies. Spinoza's substance – taking on the name of God – is able to directly ensure the intelligible *necessity* of *everything*, in the guise of *anything's* ultimate cause *and* sufficient explanation. And this is why he views all logical possibilities as actual in real terms – including the purely geometrical-ideal triangle-in-general. This latter is not internally contradictory, as would be a square circle, and so for Spinoza it is real, because the intimacy with thought of his unified-and-unitary substance, qua both *causa sui* and universal *explanans*, fuses the conceivable – defined as the non-contradictory – with the real (… at the price of robbing contradictions of reality, and hence of philosophical interest; a loose thread for our open questions in Chapter 2).

1.3. *A hidden presupposition in the impression's eclipse of the abstract*

A problem with Humean impressions, alotted the role of most basic source of the content of thoughts – 'basic' as in, not analytically decomposable, and supposedly explanatorily sufficient – would thus seems to be that they seem to need the very auto-bestowing intelligibility which is that of classical metaphysical substance in order to transmute the acephalic, uniform meaninglessness, or lack of propositional form, excessive ubiquity, and overwhelming density of spatio-temporal stains into organized and potentially classifiable *ideas* (Humean or otherwise). This threatens to undermine Hume's distaste for abstract objects, such as the generalized, formally construed triangle, but also his aim of having done with the foggy presupposition of an unconditioned faculty of transparent and reciprocal intellectual intuition between thought and real. Notwithstanding the welcome Spinozist collapse of metaphysically teleological substances, Spinoza's elision of cause and reason can only count as an instance of such a question-begging pre-established harmony.

[51] Definition 3 of the first Part of the *Ethics* (Spinoza, *Ethics,* trans. Edwin Curley, London: Penguin, 1996, 1).

The progressive, naturalizing thrust of Hume's assault upon unscrupulous presumption risks ending up mired in a self-imposed – and equally complacent – stubbornness vis-a-vis his requirement of a moment of intuitive verification before any postulate can be declared to count as true knowledge. The theory of the lively and forceful impression would appear to not be coherent in the places where it would need to be coherent in order to disqualify the reality of the abstract triangle. Genesis is, in the first instance, not necessarily relevant to intelligibility, whether operational or deductive, and its prioritization will often entail a vicious circularity. To reject intellectual intuition *à la* Descartes and Spinoza is not to refute their attribution of an autonomy, or relative autonomy, to formal determinations defined through axiomatic stipulation or dialectical construction. Without a very good reason, allowing the stain to solidify into a halting-point blocking practices involving abstraction can only be abhorrent to the very spirit of Hume's own project of emancipation from – in Kantian language – dogmatic slumber.

2. *The problem of the continuity of sensation and infinite incompossibility*

A second possible stance affirming that it is the sensorial stain which occupies a position of 'brute' underivable reference-point is one aiming to entirely upset the stability of the system of ideas. Henri Bergson, in seeking an answer to the venerable question 'What is time?', separates out two types of 'multiplicity': discrete and continuous. Discrete, discontinuous multiplicities tend to be those which are implicated in analytic thought and mathematico-scientific calculation – for example: mutually exclusive categories; numerical degree; and extended space qua metrically measurable, simultaneously in any direction. In contrast, examples of continuous, 'smooth' multiplicities would include intermingling feelings, or the gapless succession of graded shades in the colour-spectrum, or a climbing sonorous pitch graphically figureable as a sound wave of which the contiguous peaks and troughs grow ever closer as its frequency increases. Time itself – which, for Bergson, is, qua pure 'duration', a continuous multiplicity – will only be reached by purifying sensuous intuition of the clutter of discrete multiplicities.

The waxing of memory through lived experience – always singular and, at each new moment, holistically recalibrated – on this account puts us in touch with the Absolute insofar as, on the level of sensuous intuition, prior to any skewed analysis proceeding along the lines of biased criteria, the vibration of *our own* duration can be integrated with the vibrations immediately surrounding it, both faster and slower in frequency.[52] Deleuze, in *Difference and Repetition*, appears to retain from Bergson this privileging of the a-semantic *sentiendum*, which, at least in the central chapter of the book, remains purportedly untouched by the slightest

[52] Cf., for example Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison, NY: Citadel, 1992, 149-152.

mediation[53]. This radically meaningless stain is alloted the crucial role of instigator of the cascade of shocks which disturbs the habitual, banal accord of the faculties of mind, forcing them to snap out of the representational mode, wherein anything exterior is commensurated with pre-established frames of scale and categorization, and into a direct coitus with their own ontological substrates.

It may well be that one should grant that space and (not just) time, as the forms of sensuous intuition must be – as Kant specifies – *transcendentally deduced and postulated as being* infinitely divisible continua, *in principle* sensitive to fine-grained unbroken degrees of strength and weakness in matter's affection of intuition which are, *ex hypothesi*, infinitesimal: infinitely and unmeasurably small. But why should the ribbons of phenomenal smoothness – by all accounts themselves synthetically derivative, and *ideal* qua phenomenal and apparent, as opposed to (meta-)physical – be unified and allowed to swell up, bloating once again on the model of substance, so as to erect yet another barrier and halting point to the investigability of the relations between meaningless stains and meaningful non-stains?

The vibration or sine-wave is but one possible model of the behaviour of matter. And Deleuze's declared intention is, after all, to scatter Spinoza's uber-substance onto its non-substantial modes, fulfilling its collapse by deriving it from them in order to attain an immanent and non-closed dispersal of sufficient explanations, thereby warding off the risk that Spinozist univocity be ideologically operationalized as a totalized, domineering unexplained explainer[54]. Possibility – construed as ontological-real, rather than epistemic – is to be unboundedly infinitized such as not to be allowed to exclude incompossibilty and incommensurability from within itself. As this is attempted in *Difference and Repetition* via the altogether *conceptual* thought-experiment of a dice-throw reiterated to infinity, permitting the affirmation of the necessity of chance as a whole[55], the question is all the more urgently begged as to why it should be a *sentiendum,* rather than something which one might ordinarily or in quotidian language speak of as 'abstract' and cognitive – such a square circle, or an even less banal contradiction than this – that is permitted alone to provide the friction of discovery.

3. *The crux of non-trivial meaninglessness suppressed by empty indeterminacy*

[53] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, London/NY: Continuum, 2004, 176-178.

[54] Cf. *ibid.,* 50.

[55] *Ibid.,* 248-249.

A final preparatory loop will bring us to our crux. A third strategy for undermining the auto-sufficiency of meaningfulness, elaborated in a certain strand of Lacanianism, involves focusing on the meaningless structure underpinning semantics. We may be obliged pragmatically to treat the world as a coherent totality, but the non-existence of any metaphysical meta-language, and the discovery that a set containing all sets is a logico-mathematical paradox, undermine the stability of the boundaries of the symbolic order upon which we rely and reveal that it functions only thanks to its disavowed structuration around the 'void' constituted by its fractured openness to its own exterior.

Thus for Žižek circa 1992 the 'stain' of meaninglessness is at one and the same time the disturbing eruption of the inconsistency of the real and the manifestation of the dislocated gap of the subject's unconscious desire. He cites the tramp in Chaplin's *City Lights*, who in the film's first scene is found when a newly minted statue is uncovered by the mayor, asleep in its lap, only to be awoken by the noise of the surprised audience, who are provoked to laughter by his embarrassed scrabbling attempts to get out of the way. Žižek notes that the tramp

> is always interposed between a gaze and its 'proper' object, fixating upon himself a gaze destined for another, ideal point or object – a stain which disturbs 'direct' communication (...) leading the straight gaze astray, changing it into a kind of squint[56]

Mistaken again and again for someone else – a rich benefactor – by a flower-seller girl who is blind and in need of funds for an operation, the tramp finally presents himself to her without hiding behind this confusion. 'This is the moment of death and sublimation: (…) his being is no longer determined by a place in the symbolic network, it materializes the pure Nothingness of the hole, the void in the Other (the symbolic order)'[57].

Identifying the stain-disturbance with *meaningless per se and as a whole* here allows Žižek to de-metaphorize it by cauterizing it sharply in the sequestration of a (purportedly) non-relational, purely empty void. However, there is cause for hesitation. The unsublatable 'void' is no doubt central in the psychoanalytic register of unconscious desire, but, as we understand him, Žižek's philosophical commitment is that such a void (to which we will return via Laruelle) is the precondition *of any and all intelligibility whatsoever*. If that which throws a spanner in the works of meaning is construed as *always* being the twin void of desire and symbolic incompleteness, we

[56] Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and out*, New York: Routledge, 1992, 5.

[57] *Ibid.,* 8.

may be left wondering why the possibility of a nuanced discernment of *different types of meaninglessness* should have thus been excluded. This is the nub of our crux: is there not more to be said about what separates an a-signifying musical riff or ritornello, or an unrecognizable non-representational smear of paint (or the representation of this non-representational smear of paint), from an a-semantic anomaly in scientific observation, and these from an incompossibly over-semantic superimposition of clashing beliefs?

4. *What does 'transcendental' mean?*

Laruelle will intervene here first of all by encouraging us to concede the Kantian point that *any* perception or experience or thinking is *conditioned* by operations of shaping or enabling determination which are transcendental with respect to it. 'Transcendental' in this broadly Kantian acceptation of the term is to be understood first of all as carrying the skeletal, metaphysically threadbare sense of 'minimally necessary condition of possibility, without which the very intelligibility of the thing in question is lost'.

Kant insists that to have an experience you need to have had a synthesis of *both* a sense-perceptible determinacy *and* a form-giving function or 'concept', *through a judgement*. Moreover, the *matter of sensation* from the sensibility is itself no longer all that 'brute' by the time it arrives at the faculty of understanding to be stitched in to classificatory-categorial concepts selected via logical-propositional judgments, for it has already been – as it were – industrially squeezed through the spatio-temporal filters constituting the pure a priori dimensions of sensible intuition. 'Matter' is faceless, whereas sensuous perception through intuition is *per se* formed. Knowledge of the operativity of classificatory categories and rules for their connection is not derived from metaphysical principles but deduced from what knowledge inescapably knows about its own structure.[58] A Laruellean question mark already pops up regarding how one might hope to empirically distinguish a privileged instance of *matter* from amongst transcendentally shaped *forms*.

Euclidean three-dimensional simultaneous metrical extension *partes extra partes*, for space, and succession, for time – one thing happening after another, serially – are for Kant not to be mistaken for properties of the bare things-in-themselves. Indeed, if in the immediately preceding paragraph we have allowed ourselves to animadvert to a piston-pumping hydraulic expository metaphorics of 'matter' being 'squeezed' through 'filters', this is a heuristic ladder which needs to be speedily kicked away and burnt – otherwise it will, we would claim, rapidly become misleading. Any vaguely hydraulic model for talking about Kantian transcendental

[58] In parallel with this, Kant writes in a letter of July 1, 1794, to Jacob Sigismund Beck, that 'we can only understand and communicate to others what we ourselves can *produce*' (Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*, trans. and ed. Arnulf Zweig, Cambridge: CUP, 1999, 482. My italics.)

conditioning should – in our view – be rejected, because Kant's aim is precisely to burst the bubble of the 'clear-and-distinct', transparently intelligible physics and metaphysics of the same philosophers as blanched at by Hume. Interestingly, in Kant *there is no transparent givenness of space nor of time*, since, rather than being taken for granted, both forms are deduced, through reasonings-by-the-absurd, as *conditions of possibility of the operativity of judging*, while meanwhile substantiality – the type of actuality accruing to what is physically real – undergoes a drastic reconceptualization. In Danielle Macbeth's words:

> Kant claims that space and time, although empirically real, are transcendentally ideal. And he does so because space and time are, he thinks, systems of relations. Things as they are in themselves, that is, substances, are constitutively self-subsistent; they cannot bear constitutive relations to other things (because that is incompatible with their being self-subsistent). But spatial things do bear constitutive relations to other things. Substances, then, cannot be inherently spatial. The spatiality of the things we experience cannot be really real. (And the same of course holds for the temporality of the things we experience.) As Kant explains in the *Prolegomena* [...] in the case of spatial things, 'the part is possible only through the whole' but this 'never occurs with things in themselves as objects of the understanding alone.' [...] Not only space and time but reality itself insofar as it is constitutively spatiotemporal is transcendentally ideal.[59]

The empirical actuality of the ideal forms of space and time is a posited condition of possibility of the judgements constituting any knowledge at all. Judging is predicating properties

[59] Danielle Macbeth, *Realizing Reason: A Narrative of Truth and Knowing*, Oxford: OUP, 2014, 166. For the text quoted by Macbeth, see Kant, *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. & ed. Gary Hatfield, Cambridge: CUP, 2004 [1783], 38, AK 4:286. Across the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Prolegomena* we have the argument that what is given to us through outer sense (space) and inner sense (time) is subjective *representations of relations*, whereas the physical substances themselves are inherently self-subsistent and non-related. Part-whole relations cannot be smuggled into the thing-in-itself, and so it is only to the forms of intuition that is owed the incongruence or non-overlap of a left hand or glove with a right hand or glove, or of 'oppositively spiralled snails' (Kant, *Prolegomena*, 38, AK 4:286). Such incongruence, insofar as we allow that it is actual, cannot be accounted for through the concepts deployed in judgements, but rather only by attributing a certain type of independent structuration to the ideal form of space.

or relations of grammatical subjects. However – and our readerly argument here would wish to kick against Heidegger's, just as much as (importantly for what we will have to say later on) against any communicative-action theory that might want to try to use Kant to make reality into nothing more than what people deliberatively agree it is – if this model is clearly based on speech, on saying sentences, in Kant himself we do *not* find a quotidian notion of chat being positivized and relied upon. Rather, judging qua predicating is a skeletally formal characterization of the shape which Kant believes an act of determination must take if it is to determine anything at all, *given that he rejects the clear-and-distinct 'intellectual intuition' which would claim to directly palpate, or even create, the physico-metaphysical thing as-it-is-in-itself*. Kant therefore needs predicable properties and relations – e.g.: 'shaggy dog'; 'growling next to a cat' – to be supplied 'on the side of subjectivity', 'adding something new' to the spatio-temporally given determinacy. And indeed, to maintain a bulwark against solipsistic idealism, he needs givenness per se to protrude itself on a level heterogenous and structurally heteronomous to the judgements which 'take' the given; if not, there could be no such thing as objective knowledge, for knowing would lack a constraint and illusion-for-correction would be impossible.[60] This is a deductive reasoning-by-the-absurd, and so the reading upon which I would like to insist is that in Kant there is no *diaphanous transparency* of the given whatsoever: an intuiting which is accessible to reflection

[60] Among the reasonings-by-the-absurd relevant here are those we read in the opening three paragraphs of the Transcendental Aesthetic in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. & ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: CUP, 1998 [1787], 172-173, A20/B34):

> [A]ll thought, whether straightaway (*directe*) or through a detour (*indirecte*), must, by means of certain marks, ultimately be related to intuitions, thus, in our case, to sensibility, since there is no other way in which objects can be given to us.
>
> The effect of an object on the capacity for representation, insofar as we are affected by it, is **sensation**. That intuition which is related to the object through sensation is called **empirical.** The undetermined object of an empirical intuition is called **appearance**.
>
> I call that in the appearance which corresponds to sensation its **matter**, but that which allows the manifold of appearance to be ordered in certain relations I call the **form** of appearance. Since that within which the sensations can alone be ordered and placed in a certain form cannot itself be in turn sensation, the matter of all appearance is only given to us *a posteriori*, but its form must all lie ready for it in the mind *a priori*, and can therefore be considered separately from all sensation.

As recent research by Cecile Malaspina may lead one to hazard, does it not seem that the distinction between opaque noise (disorder) and interiorly inter-relating 'inherent' qualification (order) is here *already dialectical*? (For Malaspina's treatment of noise see Malaspina, *An Epistemology of Noise*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018.)

is a representation and when one is representing one is already judging. This does not imply *any* metaphysically positive claims about deliberation or everyday chatting; and yet Kant does think that *predicating* is of the essence of determining even a scuzzy spatio-temporal stain.[61] We hope the reader will forgive us for insisting – which will need to be backed up in what follows – that this is need not degenerate into a 'conservative' reading, but rather, and *a fortiori* with respect to stains, is the reading necessary for opening up the question of *negativity*.

The nineteenth century's neo-Kantians, among them Hermann Cohen, take the further step of de-reifying the *contingent* formal specificities of the forms of intuition, seeking to avoid that they be peremptorily nailed down and frozen in an ahistorical snapshot, as was the tendency in Kant himself, in spite of his unlatching of the essential reality of intuition from dictation through metaphysical first principles. On the neo-Kantian account, there is no in-principle barrier to our coming in the future to conceive of – or, at a stretch, even intuit – as-yet-unconceptualized spatio-temporal modalities. Of course, since Kant such a break had in fact occurred, with the discovery in the eighteenth century of non-Euclidean geometries. These geometries follow from the cancellation of Euclid's fifth postulate, which had proscribed the touching of parallel straight lines, its cancellation having been achieved through plotting the parallels on the surface of a sphere. And this would happen again with Einstein's elaboration of general relativity.

Aiming to radicalize the transcendentalist stance in an unprecedented way, Laruelle will seek to definitively deconstruct or molecularize the unsatisfactory category of 'the matter of sensation', with its shifting models of sine wave, particulate atom, unbalanced clashing forces,

[61] Regarding the 'transcendental' status of predication, it is therefore not irrelevant to note that the first appearance of the term 'transcendental' in the lineage which leads to Kant's adoption of it is in the Medieval period, from the 12th century, and that although it was then used – by, for example, Aquinas – with a very different meaning from the one it acquires with and after Kant, and in the context of a framework of presuppositions at odds with him, nonetheless from the start it had the connotation of '*unavoidable*'. In the medieval-scholastic setting this was because it referred to those properties which were taken to be the 'most common', or, more precisely, 'trans-categorical, predicated of being as such and of all real beings' (cf. Wouter Goris and Jan Aertsen, 'Mediaval Theories of Transcendentals', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2019 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendentals-medieval/index.html.) That for Albertus Magnus *being as such* was *unum* – one or unified – *bonum* – good – and *verum* – true – is indicative of why one may take Kant's emptying out of any simply-given content from the skeleton of discursive transcendental form (content henceforth becoming, in-the-first-instance, opaque to knowledge, and hence demanding to be decided-upon and constructed in what will be the Hegelian 'crushing' and rebuilding of the encountered phenomenon) to be a step forward from the scholastic approach, although certainly it should be kept in mind that Kant uses tools elaborated by it.

and so on. In Chapter 2 we will adumbrate a few of Laruelle's central ideas, which we will argue are linked to the escape-route leading out of the clasp of our crux.

But first it will be helpful to get onto the table and provisionally define a further terminological polarity, one which will be key to this study as a whole: that of 'universality' and 'particularity'. We will do this by taking a quick first pass at raising the question of time and temporality, a question posing problems which Laruelle's hyperkantianism – like that of John Mactaggart, as we have already glimpsed, and as we will again later on – *suspends*.

5. *The jargon of 'universal' and 'particular'*

What exactly do we mean by 'universal' and 'particular'? As with any hoary old pieces of jargon, there is the risk of a chronic vagueness which might dissimulate all manner of argumentative sleights-of-hand.

For a 'universal' we may give the rough preliminary definition of an *idea* or *concept* which is *non-empirical* in the specific sense that you are forced to make consequential *decisions* regarding what it means in its bare bones, and regarding whether it has a claim to your attention or not, decisions which can't be adjudicated with reference to any empirical givens. There's no short-cut to get around a universal: you have to think through its logical form in order to decide what to do with it. Hegel – who, starting from Chapter 3, will be among the key foci of our study – will say that 'universality', albeit *prima facia* empty, comes thanks only to the unconditional status of *the concept per se* as a *self*-relating, *self*-concretizing negativity – although if and how concepts are able to concretize themselves will turn out to be controversial in the post-Hegelian foment and skirmishes. Minimally though, at least a facet of this notion seems binding for this piece of jargon, viz., that deciding what a universal means is going to be underdetermined by empirical facticities. Nature is silent and unhelpful on the concretion of universals, as is history, if 'history' be viewed as a catalogue of facts about what-has-happened in different places.

By way of an (instructively awkward) example, one may think of the concept 'good'. Here we will allow some accents of our later polemical arguments to creep in through the awkwardly instructive example. If we do not honour an *unconditional* empirical underdetermination of what the word 'good' means, and of how to apply it, then the concept 'good' could be relativized as a mere cultural-empirical datum, along the lines of: perhaps things are going wrong in only a few cultures, whereas in others everything's hunky-dory; perhaps we don't need to commit ourselves to making revisable decisions about what 'better' might mean as opposed to 'worse', and can rather trust this seductive demagogue to decide for us; perhaps we can conclude the matter by setting a sensible and modest practical criterion for the completion of

as widespread an optimization as we take to be feasible, and aim to get it sewn up within the next five years[62].

And 'particular' we may take to refer to the circumstances afforded by the world as it empirically happens to be, *a posteriori*, separately from rational-inferential necessities accruing to the shapes of concepts and their inter-connections. Particularity pertains to the frictional resistance and obstacle-constrainedness implied in the idea of spatio-temporal entities being bound to given circumstances and physical laws, as well as to the frictional resistance and obstacle-constrainedness implied by the fact that people have to deal with socio-cultural, and psychic, states of affairs that are contingent and objective, in the sense of being not of their own design. Thus 'particularity' may refer to the resistant obstacle-character of desires, compulsions, and psychic blockages which strike people without them choosing them.

Hegel will ask: If we want to do justice to the particular, in its particularity, does this make sense without acknowledging the universal through distinction from which the particular takes on its meaning?

Indeed – to broach time and temporality – according to Hegel in the opening pages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* the 'now' itself is a universal. How do we who are alive understand our present 'now'? The suggestion can be made that we understand it through conceptual mediations which are not tied to the biological 'now' of the organism, conceptual mediations which it would make no sense to pin to the nine billion people who are alive now *in exclusion of*, say, the people who lived in an earlier moment of the capitalist epoch like the nineteenth century, let alone in exclusion of the billions of others who are also not alive anymore. Thus for Hegel the 'now' is a universal *form* – its content might be night-time or daytime; but this doesn't rule out variability in the articulation of the form. Linear succession vs. cyclicality, for instance, are two ways of placing the 'now' within differing relational shapes which construe historical temporality in different ways.

Let us say that, if the Victorian-bourgeois 'Whiggish' conception viewing 'progress' as the motor of history sees time moving along in a unidirectional succession of things getting better

[62] Cf. Quentin Meillassoux, 'The Immanence of the World Beyond' in eds. Candler & Cunningham, *The Grandeur of Reason*, London: SCM, 2010, 444-478, 453-454. Dealing with time and the good, in this essay Meillassoux opens up a speculative interrogation regarding the possibility of a 'catastrophic' non-linear break in historical *and physical* time, one which would make death reversible, the dead rising from their graves and ashes uncremating themselves. However, Meillassoux's dialectic of reversibility and irreversibility is avowedly anti-Hegelian, and strongly so. In Section 4 we will try to propose why from a post-Hegelian perspective it may be seen as problematic to treat of *physical* time as *subsuming* historical time, as we believe Meillassoux does in this essay.

and better, then this attributes an altogether different logical form to the way the 'now' fits in with the past and the future than that attributed to it by the conception of a 'wheel of time' with a cycle of epochs of flourishing and decay recurring over and over again, as for the Greeks and Romans. Temporality may or may not be unavoidable, but its content (its shape) is not simply given: how it might work, or change, is up for grabs to be thought through. It is an idle question, but how was the universal that is the 'now' different in its content, and how similar, during the paleolithic era from the 'now' now?

In this connection it will be useful to read a chunk of text from near the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, keeping in mind that spotting whether it is daytime or night-time is going to be done thanks to *particular* determinations – the sun is shining, I'm having lunch; the moon is out, I'm trying to sleep.

> To the question: '*What is the Now?*', we answer, for example, '*The "now" is the night.*' In order to put the truth of this sensuous-certainty to the test, a simple experiment will suffice. We write down this truth. A truth cannot be lost by being written down any more than it can be lost by our preserving it, and if *now*, *this midday*, we look at this truth which has been written down, we will have to say that it has become rather stale.
>
> The Now, which is the night, is *preserved*, i.e., it is treated as what it was passed off as being, namely, as an *existent*. However, it instead proves itself to be a non-existent. To be sure, the *Now* itself maintains itself but as what is not the night; likewise, it maintains itself vis-à-vis the day, which it now is, as what is also not the day, or it maintains itself as a *negative* as such. This self-maintaining Now is thus not an immediate Now but a mediated Now, for it is determined as an enduring and self-maintaining Now *as a result* of an other not existing, namely, the day or the night. Thereby it is just as simply as what it was before, *Now*, and in this simplicity, it is indifferent to what is still in play alongside it. As little as night and day are its being, it is just as much night and day. It is not affected at all by this, its otherness. Such a simple is through negation; it is neither this nor that, it is both a *not-this* and is just as indifferent to being this or that, and such a simple is what we call a *universal*. The universal is thus in fact the truth of sensuous-certainty.[63]

[63] G. W. F. Hegel, trans. & ed. Terry Pinkard, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Cambridge: CUP, 2018 [1807], 62.

A Universal is, in the first instance, empty of content and so is neither this nor that: it *is* in and through negativity – its definition qua universal is that it is *nothing in particular*. The lunch I'm eating and the sunlit scene I'm observing are a 'this' and a 'that' which by definition have a stolidly non-replaceable self-identity (or rather, in the Hegelian technicalities, *obtrudingly* stubborn mode of one-sided auto-contradicting) and restricted location, whereas the 'now' is, at least *in potential*, 'fluidly' *nonidentical to itself*: it *is only* as defined as *not* tied down to lunchtime, nor to daylight hours. The 'now' can be predicated of many differing instances – a country's post-industrial phase, half-time at the Superbowl, whatever – whereas my lunch can only be predicated of itself. The Superbowl is not my lunch, only my lunch is my lunch; particulars cannot be predicated of particulars.

One baseline justification for (what may look like) the fanciful speculation implied in this recourse to negativity[64] could be that, reasoning by the absurd, it is necessary to postulate the effectivity of our 'putting at arm's length' the brute immediacy of spatio-temporal stimulus: without a power of judgement and free decision we would be like Pavlov's dogs, limited to pre-set causally-determined knee-jerk reactions to everything that happened to us. The question 'What time is it now?' in such a scenario could not even arise.[65] This baseline justification would really be Kantian rather than properly Hegelian, but nonetheless it can still be said that a power of judgement and free decision is inconceivable without conceptual mediators which *negate* particularity by floating free of it in purely intelligible patterns of multiply-instantiable invariancies: these are Universals.

The Hegelian will be able to mount a defense against the charge of dogmatic Platonism thanks precisely to negativity: *what* the universals are is (in principle) a matter of plasticity and change, it remains up for grabs; to be 'universal' they simply have to negate particularity by being non-self-identical in a strongly self-relating fashion: by being open to taking on many different

[64] A powerfully concise treatment of Hegelian negativity is given by Julia Kristeva in the second chapter of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, NY/Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1984. We are, however, in this connection not in agreement with Kristeva's take on the relation between thought and what we can call, as a shorthand, non-thought.

[65] Indeed, one might derive what Kant calls 'spontaneity' with reference to the imagination. The imagination can produce a protean procession of forms, fictions, chimeras, and hypotheses, which are not tethered to what has been empirically-perceptually encountered. This aspect of thought cannot be straightforwardly reduced to ('explained away' with reference to) spatio-temporal particularity. If the hypothetical-imaginary products of thought were *causally* determined as *mere* epiphenomena of neurophysiological occurrences then they would be shackled to the finitude of those occurrences and the procession would not be open-ended.

shapes and contents, by *negating themselves*. And ultimately, for Kant as for Hegel, to presume a reductive precedence of particularity over universality is to assume too much metaphysically, since 'particularity' only gains its intelligibility in the first place as the dialectical or transcendental contrary of 'universality'. Particularity is that which logically negates universality, through the very mediation of universality. This is *not* to argue that particularity is not real, only that we have no unmediated cognitive access to it, and so must not assume that we automatically understand how it works or what it is like in itself. To reify particularity is to betray it.

Nonetheless, even in its emptiness, any specific universal *is* given a skeletal *form* through the relations which place it with respect to other universals: thus, the 'now' has to be viewed in some kind of position in between 'past' and 'future', otherwise its very signification evaporates. For Hegel and Kant, individual flesh-and-bone or quark-and-electron or hydrocarbon-and-sodium-chloride particularity couldn't alone give you any *mediating meanings*.

However, the *hyperkantianism* deployed by Laruelle will suspend the terms in which such a polarity is posed. Regarding the discourse through which universal is distinguished from particular – just as regarding sense-perceptible stains – he will seek to suspend any philosophically postulated relations by effectuating *indifference*.

Chapter 2
Non-Standard Stainless: Laruelle and Non-sufficiency

1. *Radical immanence*

Laruelle's innovation hereupon lies in his contestation that to think in a thoroughly immanent manner involves accepting the 'Identity-of-the-last-instance' of thought itself with the Real, the *indifferent* unseparation of the two, in such a way as to acknowledge – in a seeming paradox – the sheerness of the *scission* between transcendentally conditioned and determined forms, of any kind, with that which is entirely undivided and identical to itself, and hence no longer the slightest bit ideal, but real and only real. Laruelle's Real is given the name of 'radical immanence' or 'the One', and is apodictically deduced and axiomatically defined as precisely that which is not muddied by even the slightest hint of transcendence, or of any *relativity to* anything – other than itself.

The merest scrap of empirical determinacy will always imply a split or division between its conditional occasionment and that unconditioned Real which is immanent only to itself, rather than to anything else, and which

> gives nothing of itself and receives nothing of itself except the modality in which it is given. This is only possible if it is the one or the indivision, the Without-division, which is given to itself in its specific (that is, indivisible) modality[66]

Thus, the One is in-principle separated from and *foreclosed to* any type of thought: not only to sense-perceptible phenomenal palpation, but also to the operations of representation, as well as to any philosophical manoeuvre relying upon the glue of substance to hold it together: it is '*index sui* prior to any indication'[67].

According to Laruelle, thought must therefore distinguish itself from the One, while the One does not distinguish itself from thought in return. Its foreclosure is tied up with this irreversible, untransparent asymmetry. Given data – be they numbers or smudges – are, as per Kant, determinate (exhibiting certain specific characteristics rather than others), as well as *synthetically* unified. But the fact that determinacy must *per se* be distinguished from indeterminacy does not warrant any hypostatization of the gap between the two, for how could one flesh-out a narrative describing the emergence of the condition of possibility of

[66] Laruelle, 'The Truth According to Hermes: Theorems on the Secret and Communication', trans. Alexander R. Galloway, *Parrhesia* 9 (2010), 18-22, 22.

[67] *Ibid.*

narrativization? Such an attempt would reify what is a skeletal, merely intelligible transcendental necessity into a story held hostage by the very contingent empirical experiences it is supposed to account for.

We are thus, according to Laruelle, forced to confront the undeniable split between conditioned and unconditioned as an epistemic-and-at-the-same-time-real lacuna which pulverizes any pretension we may have had to diaphanously discern, in a representational mode of truth-as-correspondence (as *any type* of correspondence), the relations of causality and conditioning which are in fact in play. A blindspot which, further, undermines the sufficiency of the very notions of 'causality' and 'conditioning' to the task of binding the phenomenal appearances together at a safely regulated distance from the unbound indeterminacy of the Kantian negative noumenon, that cut of withdrawal cauterizing our finite cognition from its own outside. Thus, in the theoretical practice Laruelle is recommending, the non-standard theoretician does not contemplate or represent anything, but rather *does* something, slicing into overinflated co-optations of the Real illegitimately construed, on the model of substance, as a totality of relations which the philosopher might exhaustively survey. This action requires the *axiomatic* affirmation of the 'determination-in-the-last-instance' of the determined *per se* by the purely immanent Identity-of-the-last-instance of *everything* with the Real[68] – whether a given thing ends up being occasionally determined, via whatever transcendental operations of objectivation, as this or as that, as a headache or as Fermat's last theorem. The mainstay of Laruellean non-standard philosophical practice – the word *practice* being heavily emphasized – is the carrying out of this act, which 'unilateralizes' philosophical decisions.

2. *Determination in the last instance and Unilateralization*

Who or what is acting though? Laruelle often nominates the subject of non-standard philosophy as none other than the 'human' or 'Man-in-person', whose immediate 'Lived Experience' is, in-itself, said to be perfectly irreflexive – i.e., effective, qua itself identical-to-the-One, prior to the closing of the loop of self-reference through which philosophy, according to Laruelle, tries to plaster over its own dislocation from the Real. However, on this point we will prefer to look at an instance of a conflicting tendency in his work, whereby the ultimate irreflexive instance of Identity in-itself – strictly in-itself, rather than through any of its mediations; that which applies the positively negative or negatively positive 'pressure-from-below' which dislodges the attempt to metaphysically substantialize conceptual synthesis – is construed as

[68] An effectuatable aspect of or upon things which Dominic Fox glosses as '*underdetermined underdetermination*' (Fox, 'Structure and System in Badiou and Laruelle', 2015. https://medium.com/@poetix/structure-and-system-in-badiou-and-laruelle-1fb5c891a13c).

being simply the One itself. If we are to carry out a thorough criticism of the auto-sufficiency of conceptual synthesis, why would the 'human' and 'lived experience' be let off the hook?[69]

'Determination in the last instance' means then,

> among other things, that the One does not act by itself and through a part of itself which it would alienate into the World and which it would identify with this latter; and also that the finite act upon the World is identically, immediately, its distanciation from the One, the affirmation of its non-unitary non-confusion with the One. The One acts *in the last instance only*, and it acts on the World by determining it to not be the One.
>
> 'Last instance' does not indicate a first or final cause in a causal continuum (the famous indefinite progressions or regressions in the conditions of a conditioned), nor does it respond to the complementary qualm regarding stopping the causal chain [...] *It is not in the slightest to these problems that the theory of determination in the last instance responds but rather to their 'exclusion', more exactly to their unilateralization.*[70]

So, as hinted at above, Laruelle's Real is *not a condition* but is rather the determinant of any determinacy whatsoever, insofar as the latter is *per se* separated from the undetermined. The determined thing ends up being shaped thus and so, rather than otherwise, by *contingent* occasional instances of conditioning, but this only makes sense if the determined thing is distinguished in its general sharp (or hazy) *ipseity* from the blankness of Identity qua Identity, i.e., from the facelessness from which *ipseity* is distinguished insofar as it is identical to itself rather than to 'nothing', this latter being the form that pure Identity qua Identity in isolation must take[71]. However, every phenomenon is in fact itself identical-in-the-last-instance with the Real qua the One, because anything and everything can and must, in – and only in – the last instance, be seen to fall under the mode of indivision. Indivision ultimately gains the upper hand in the

---

[69] For a variant of this quibble, see Fox, 'Under Pressure: Marx, Metaphysics and the Cunning of Abstraction. (Response to Katerina Kolozova)', Symposium contribution, 2017. https://syndicate.network/symposia/philosophy/toward-a-radical-metaphysics-of-socialism/.

[70] Laruelle, *Une biographie de l'homme ordinaire. Des Autorités et des Minorités*, Paris: Aubier, 1985, 140, 141.

[71] This Laruellean articulation of the negative 'nothing' is fruit of a negotiation with Heidegger.

parallax between, on the one hand, the perspective upon things viewed within the synthetic discourse-Worlds in which philosophical decisions envelop them, and, on the other, the perspective upon things viewed in so far as they are Identical and undivided, stripped of mediation (Laruelle's 'Vision-in-One'). The former needs the latter, but not *vice versa*.

As we will see, the undivided has Identity but no unity, such that the 'splintering off' from the One of the particular, specific transcendental operations by which thinking objectivates and organises things cannot be philosophically hardened into a *metaphysical* transcendence, because the ontological status of the processes leading to the separation of object from subject and subject from object, as well as the criteria for their successful mapping, have been epistemically scrambled ('fractalized'). That is, no recourse to substance can be made in trying to put one's finger on how precisely these processes might work. It is not only that it is structurally impossible for a conditioned experience to glance airily back over its own shoulder in order to glimpse the mechanisms of its own conditioning – of which it is, therefore, in the first instance oblivious – but also that any fleck of experience must be exposed in its non-reciprocal dependency upon – its irreversible distinguishment from – the One, by the operation of unilateralization.

This uni-directional severment, applying indifferently across the schematic stratifications of thought to fragments and atoms just as much as to the relations between these terms, is also the annulment of any hope for the auto-intelligible or self-unveiling automatic connection of these determinations. Thus the very distinction between thinking and non-thinking itself will take the form of a *unilateral* duality or 'Identity-without-unity': a duality with only one side, here that of thinking, which distinguishes itself from non-thinking without non-thinking distinguishing itself from it in return. More precisely, *both* terms, thinking (ideality), and non-thought ('materiality', let's say), are unilateralized through the revelation of their equal relativity to the blindspot of real non-dialectical negativity. Thought needs the Real, but the Real does not need thought.

3. *Inconsistency, and the desubstantialization of the void*

For Kant, known determinacies are, of course, endowed with self-Identity, and so too is the noumenon, with the difference that the Identity-to-itself of the noumenon is non-given and unknowable, beyond being limited by Kant to the principle of non-contradiction. But what if the – so to speak – acidic (or oxygenating) underdetermination and non-relationality of the noumenon cannot be held back from seeping into the appearances and untethering the stifling extra layer of relational mediation with which unearned metaphysical presumption decides to arbitrarily unify and organize the otherwise splendidly immediate and unrelated singularities occurring in the realm of the determined? 'Thus understood, this Identity' – which we suggest should be aligned with the self-Identity of the negative noumenon qua cut of Kantian finitude – 'emancipates

singularities that are at last radical, fractals that are no longer subjected to it.'[72] And what if the non-relation which asymmetrically determines relational determination entails that even by

[72] Laruelle, *Theory of Identities* [*Théorie des identités. Fractalité généralisé et philosophie artificielle*, 1992], trans. Alyosha Edlebi, NY: Columbia, 2016, xix. Laruelle unreservedly affirms the fascination shared by a number of his peers with objects that are constitutively fractured and lacking the completion which would close them off from their inherent definition via reference to external factors. The fractal is emblematic of such 'singularities' in that, if any one phase of its reiteration is isolated and 'unified', it loses its very identity and its principle of non-linear (dis)organization. Likewise, the tangled criss-crossing strings studied by mathematical 'catastrophe theory' and the 'critical points' which, in dynamical systems theory, break the symmetry of a system's phase space, are instantiations precisely of contingency and unpredictability, which nonetheless do not auto-manifest *their own* status as such, for they are only so determined through contrast with a principle of necessity and predictability immanent to the particular sciences in which they originate (the particular axiomatic 'games'). Laruelle's gripe is that these objects have not been deployed ruthlessly enough, or with sufficient thoroughness, to once and for all debunk the targeted transcendent models of philosophical unity (Laruelle, *Theory of Identities*, xvii-xviii.):

> The central problem [of the book *Theory of Identities*] is the one through which contemporary philosophies have critiqued and 'liquidated' the Hegelianism, the Marxism, and the structuralism that preceded them: the problem of *singularities* and *differences*, *partial objects* and *critical points*, *catastrophes* and *effects*, *disseminations* and *language games*... All of these objects were directed against 'logos,' 'presence' or 'representation,' 'metaphysics' and so on, and have become philosophy's commonplace. But from our point of view, they represent a half-solution, an unfinished attempt at the critique of metaphysics. Why? Because they always associate with these singularities of various kinds an *identity*, but *as at least equal to them or reversible with them*. Identity thus falls back on the singularities, appropriates them, capitalizes or traditionalizes them, subordinates them to an indeterminate generality, and so forth. This solution entails their erasure or drowning.

Singularities are for Laruelle no longer to be construed as hiding within themselves principles fit to be extended to the whole of 'Being', even or especially when the aim of this extension is to undermine some other older unificatory principle, because this operation surreptitiously relies upon the bad type of transcendence it is supposed to destroy. 'Dissemination' cannot then for Laruelle be privileged as 'a name of the Real' over other possible occasional names. Not even the 'multiple' is a satisfactory name-of-the-Real, because it remains *relative* for its intelligibility to synthetic unity: '[t]he One as real Identity is a *One-without-unity* (and) a *Multiple-without-multiplicity*.' (Laruelle *Theory of Identities*, 49.) If a wager made by Laruelle is that there is a possible mode of theoretical practice wherein fractured singularities are deployed without the slightest synthetic mediation (his recent work on 'Quantum philo-fiction' claiming to carry-out something along these lines), our tacit assertion here will be that the success or failure of this claim to have

speaking of the thing-in-itself as 'non-contradictory' one was illegitimately reifying it as a bound relational determination, serenely set over in front of the mind's contemplating eye, in a manner redolent of Aristotelian substance? These are the questions Laruelle asks, and his non-standard philosophical reply is that, when it comes to philosophy, this is what has always already happened.

It transpires – on Laruelle's account – that 'unity' (in contradistinction to Identity) is always synthetically produced, because unification requires totality and totalization is always a synthetic operation. Thus the manner in which one totalizes a field of determinacies always follows off the back of a supplementary decision of thought, tying together groupings of things into extraneously marshalled assemblages by catching them in a fishing net centred upon a selected principle. Whence Laruelle's suspension of *philosophical decision per se*. A bicycle with a pedal-powered light in a dark alleyway requires a first push in some tenebrous direction before illumination of what's ahead of its front wheel is achieved[73]: similarly for Laruelle philosophical relationality is dictated off the back of decisions which are arbitrarily[74] one-sided and which never manage to dialectically relate themselves to themselves (learn about themselves), as this is impossible or is only ever a pretence. Dismounting from the bike to try to survey the alleyway and one's own position in it makes the light go out. Skirmishes among philosophers are therefore farcical, and, rather than continuing to participate in the maritime battles, non-standard science wants to plug itself directly into the Real by taking a step back from the fray, suspending decision, and undulatorily capturing philosophy's hues, like the rippling surface of the sea catching the hues of the sky[75], or like a quantum collider colliding *decisions themselves*. This is a non-related,

---

shaken off (or 'unilateralized') all and any mediation should not be seen as central to what is ultimately most interesting about non-standard philosophy.

[73] The metaphor is Pierre Hadot's and is used by Rocco Gangle to clarify Laruelle's suspension of decision (Cf. Gangle, *François Laruelle's Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction and Guide*, Edinburgh: EUP, 2013, 167).

[74] He talks about 'the One and its non-relation to language, upon which it imposes a radical contingency by robbing it of any constitutive virtue' (Laruelle, *Philosophie et non-philosophie*, Liège: Mardaga, 1989, 49).

[75] In a certain period of his work non-philosophy is styled as *the science of philosophy*, or as simply concerning itself with the essence of scientificity per se. In a statement which might offer a suggestive parallel with the Hegelian *Ohnmacht der Natur*, we read that 'science is a non-decisional reflection (of the) real, and which does not change the latter by manifesting it.' (Laruelle, *En tant qu'un*, Paris: Aubier, 1991, 141.) And further, 'science' – in a definition with which our Hegelian (or post-Hegelian) stance will soon lead us to disagree – is said to be 'a thought that is opaque, irreflexive, deaf and blind, denuded of reflexive

non-antagonistic voyage with Jason and the Argonauts through the flotsam of relationality and antagonism, claiming to have suspended their stakes[76].

That's as may be, but the grist of what interests us *here* is that, in the case of Bergson and certain moments in Deleuze, the Laruellean reading will have it that, far from unmediated bruteness, we have the selection of an operational principle, which takes stochastic seriality as a necessary and reversible *name* for the very bridge supposed to let the Real flow into thought and thought flow back into the Real. This is a name for *scission itself* allowing its modelling as a smooth, continuous variation and auto-distantiantion, folded back into its determinant and said to be a necessary property of it, i.e., of that unscissioned without which scission cannot make sense.[77]

---

thickness or of ontological depth, a sort of theoretical "behaviour" […]; it escapes the disjunction of knowledge and thought' (*Ibid.*, 26).

[76] Hence some thinkers influenced by non-standard philosophy will suggest that what is *wrong* with capitalism is that it is *relational*. However, as we believe must have been clear from our Introduction, and as will be to the fore starting from the next Chapter, we are not in agreement with this suggestion.

[77] Thus, writing about Heidegger, in tones more approving than those in which he tends to write about Deleuze and the metaphysical Nietzsche, both of whom he can here be taken to be rebuking, in such as way as to further hint at the role of *finitude* in his own set up (Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-philosophy*, trans. Rocco Gangle, London/NY: Continuum, 2010 [1986], 63; my interposition and emphasis of what I take to be a dig at Deleuze ant the metaphysical Nietzsche):

> Difference [in Heidegger] is indeed an indivision or a unity of Being and beings, and a real indivision: *it is not an ideal and infinitely divisible continuum*. Finitude is what gives it reality and consequently its indivisibility to Difference, its repulsion from every division and every integration in itself of new immanent relations.

It is indeed instructive to note Laruelle's proximity to Heidegger on the question of a *finitude* which is no longer Kantian-subjective but *simply real*, and at the same time repellent of any ideal sublation, self-relating negativity, or interior relationality. Gesturing at how what he shares with Heidegger may mark him apart from Spinoza (proximity with whom Deleuze has accused him), Laruelle comments further that in Heidegger finitude

> is a 'scission' that is immediately the One, it is the One that is immediately withdrawal and does not receive withdrawal as an accident or even as an essential property or attribute. The One cannot act except *as* withdrawal – here is the sense of the tautology: 'Withdrawal withdraws', which signifies that it is the highest essence, not an affect belonging to Being, but Being's essence that effects Being itself. (*Ibid.*)

Identity (in contradistinction to unity) is for Laruelle not synthetic or transcendental, but simply immanent – that is, irreflexive, and precisely *lacking* any unified horizon, limiting bound or halting point which could provide the basis for the recuperation of self-identical forms into a closed set such that a scale and a principle for the commensuration of them which each other could be found.

The uncorking of totality, however, is a familiar idea, and we seem here to be not a million miles away from being back at the Žižekian Lacanian-Hegelian 1992 stance which we earlier claimed sacrificed the ability to distinguish between different types of meaninglessness to the void of symbolic incompleteness, getting stuck in a crux with which we were not content to rest satisfied. At this stage there indeed springs up the danger of falling into the assumption that the Real's 'rupturing' of the order of the conditioned World implies a *substantial crack* between the two. This may perhaps be a risk run by Žižek, and one which Laruelle may or may not be able to dodge.

From Laruelle's perspective, the gap at stake here cannot be substantialized, because this would require that it be totalized, and, as per the above, *unity* can only be the product of a synthetic operation.[78] Division too requires the unification of terms into a grouping separated from the undivided. This is not the case for our conceptualization of Identity or indivision itself, which can and must be defined negatively (or rather, positively, insofar as we are dealing with the cancellation of a constraint not unlike the removal of a speed-limit[79]) through the procedure of the lifting or crossing-out of division. Epistemic formlessness qua the Real qua Identity qua the

---

Laruelle will keep the real finitude, but get rid of the auto-effecting 'Being'. It seems to be becoming clear that Laruelle is a continuator of the project of an *absolutized finitude* of the determinate-determined given. We think that this is a helpful angle from which to view his constant thematization of the 'given-without-givenness'.

[78] On this point, one may compare and contrast Kant's careful separation in the first *Critique* of the logical, numerical 'identity of the function' of the apperceptive 'I' from the *categorial* determination of 'unity' (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 232-233, A107-A108). The former is the formal condition of the latter's synthetic coherence, and so cannot itself have synthetic coherence attributed to it. Kant makes the distinction in order to consolidate, rather than molecularize, the coherence of the manifold. (Cf. also Caygill's helpful entry on 'Identity' in *A Kant Dictionary*, 240-243.)

[79] Cf. Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*, Basingstoke/NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 146.

One has been rendered so thoroughly vacuous by Laruelle as to 'constitute *a hole in nothingness itself*'[80] lacking 'even the minimal consistency of the void'[81]. What does this mean?

The precise sense we give to 'consistency' here is important. This Real is *in*consistent because it does not 'hang together', surpassing any synthetic unification. However, it is crucial to note a certain result which can be obtained if we read the logic (or, anti-logic) of non-standard philosophy in the paradoxically formalizing, propositional Classical-logical fashion which seems only appropriate to Laruelle's unwavering post-neo-Kantian (neo-neo-Kantian?) adherence to a grammatical conception of predication (such as sketched above in Ch. 1; subsection 4), and his insistence on *not* collapsing this '*syntax*' of predication into the *non-syntactic* One: his insistence on not allowing syntax to be 'sublated'[82]. Indeed, if his real One is *in*consistent, it *cannot* be – for this very reason (its inconsistency) – 'incomplete', if we use these terms in an extended Gödelian-metamathematical sense. Here 'incomplete' will mean, roughly and simply, 'lacking something it should incorporate'.

In this extended-Gödelian optic, the question of logical completeness can only arise with respect to a system of stipulated rules and statements which is *consistent*, in the sense of: not allowing any contradictions to be derived from the propositions constituting it, since (in Classical logic at least) from a contradiction anything follows (the 'principle of explosion'). If we are dealing with a set of properties of a thing or a model of a thing's functioning, Classical-logical consistency can only be determined through a contradiction-free propositional characterization of the object. Positive consistency, to be logically coherent, has to be *systematic*, even if only in the exiguous sense of the disjunctively juxtapositional negation or exclusion from the object of what is opposed to it. Overspilling even opposition, and a stranger to the possibility of contradiction, Laruelle's Real is therefore *hyper*complete, at the same time as being absolutely non-consistent.

The *negation of* consistency here at play is, we recall, maintained by Laruelle to be itself not question-begging, because the resulting non-consistency is indexed by *indifference* to the distinction between contradictory and non-contradictory – that is, by the operation of lifting or crossing-out consistency: by the '*suspension*' of the synthetic operation's pretention to substantial sufficiency, upon which pretension consistency relied in the first place. Non-consistency is

[80] Laruelle, 'What can non-philosophy do?', trans. Ray Brassier, *Angelaki* 8:2 (2003), 169-189, 175.

[81] Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 137.

[82] For a syntactically structurated determined to be 'sublated' would in Laruelle's eyes violate the real *finitude* of that determined by claiming to absorb it into the picaresque enveloping-development and uber-synthesis of an *ideal* Hegelian infinity. Laruelle thus views himself as an arch anti-idealist, aiming to collapse the abstract-concrete distinction *in the direction of the concrete*.

therefore for Laruelle not the mere product of another supercilious decision, and this Real non-object – even though it cannot be propositionally encapsulated; or rather, precisely because of this, but *only* under these stringent procedural conditions – is not just one more dogmatic and queasy philosophical confection-fantasy.

We thus arrive at a – highly pointed – injunction to remain vigilant against any facile or simplistically intuitive conception of *inconsistency*. As Žižek will insist, the Real itself cannot be viewed as a closed totality, and so, if we insist upon analytically isolating it *per se*, it can only be indifferent to the distinction between autonomous self-causedness and heteronomous causation. But the default of totalization *for this very reason* does *not* at all mean that particular objects, whether concrete *or abstract*, lose their own reality, integrity, or relative autonomy. Slime and other types of oozing gunge may topple from a state of hanging together towards one of falling apart, but only in a register already presupposing the tacit consistency of a system of quasi-logical relations to associate them with, and distinguish them from, more stolid objects. And the void, once de-substantialized, is shown to remain relative to non-voids, the opposition between void and non-void plenum or atom having been, as a whole – both of its poles – unilateralized or pushed over onto the separatedly relational side of the scission between what is relational and the absolutely non-relational and unseparated One of pure self-Identity. The non-consistent One is always glued to the heel of any minimally thinkable determination, as its determinant-of-the-last-instance. Neither slime nor holes are therefore any more straightforwardly emblematic of the Real than chess-pieces, Pythagoras's theorem, partial-differential equations, or quantum matrices, which they cannot, in the first instance, be taken to swallow up, corrode, crush, or reduce.

4. *Narrative noise and the opacity of the phantasy*

Laruelle may attain the *nec plus ultra* of French anti-dialectical suspicion, but doesn't the above point in the direction of reopening, or keeping open, the unreified dialectical placement of sensation in art? Laruelle's insights can be deployed *à rebours* of own stated goals, such as to formulate some important open questions which risked being stifled by our crux.

We thus note, with respect to sensorial stains, that if they suspend their own classification in order to do things with spatio-temporal materials, then, for a start, this suspension depends on classifications being in play, rather than not. Obscurity is grasped as such in distinction from clarity, however provisional or fake. Are there particular types of clarity or pseudo-clarity in relation to which specific types of innovation in the shaping of sensorial form become especially pertinent? And what are the reasons why we might have come to desire to separate out sensorial smearing as worth pursuing in isolation from other kinds of cognitive disturbance?

Art does not *just* confront us with *sensorial* blurring, undermining our workaday representational complacency (which is not to deny that it can do this). It also (*cognitively*) confronts us with the *cognitive* breakdown entrained by our necessary lack of a full synoptic grasp

or schematic overview of our own intrication within ideological machines and global systems, presenting systemic complexity *qua* systemic complexity. Should another of art's goals be the production of new incommensurabilities, through the deployment of the various rule-bound games which constitute its own clichéd lines of least resistance, as well as its clues for how to break with these? A desideratum on both counts would be to help stave off false substantial-Aristotelian totality. In a slightly different direction: Shouldn't art bring to light something specific we didn't know about our desires now?

It might therefore be useful to supplement a desubstantialized conception of the stain with the quasi-information-theoretic function of 'noise', glossed as interference in the communication of a message – not an in-principle occluded non-informational substrate of information, but rather the presence of too much information. If the sensorial stain no longer enjoys a special privilege, it makes sense to blur and efface the lines demarcating it from the array of other types of meaninglessness, as a first step towards a more nuanced taxonomy of these. Our hunch is that the blindspot which harbours the most truth in any given situation may turn out to be locatable thanks only to its mediation with the determinate meaningfulness at play in the situation. The absolute meaninglessness of hypercomplete non-consistency – which we would like to view as a consequential ideationally-produced abstraction, and not the definitive concretion Laruelle construes it as[83] – would then be the spur to accepting that the most fecund *contradictions* are

[83] Dominic Fox ask a question: Why does Laruelle choose from within the scientific domains that interest him certain objects – fractals, quantum matrices – *rather than* other equally available objects, picking some and not others to be given the 'unilateralizing' treatment by which he relativizes them into indifferently generic occasional instances of the un-principled Identity of a centreless and purportedly 'undulatory' or 'matricial' Real? (Fox, 'Structure and System in Badiou and Laruelle'.) Are Laruelle's procedures of selection really *so* indifferent as all that to specific decided-upon rules of synthetic construction, and to *determinate* laws of structuration? Fox doubts this. Do Laruelle's choices not tend to be *minimally* structured? The general pattern is they are either isolated atomic building blocks, or formal shorthands for disorder. '[A] "minimal instance of structure" is always minimal relative to some particular system of structuration.' (Fox, *op cit*.) Laruelle's continued interest in models of partiality and fragmentation from this perspective appears as an *affinity* with those of his peers who pursue the aim of thematising, in an organised if not whole-heartedly 'philosophical' fashion, the breaking and breakdown of structural laws. Fox is for this reason lead to conclude, '[i]f Laruelle is not himself a systematic thinker […] he is nevertheless inexorably tied to systematic evaluation in his non-philosophical practice: a "heretic", yes, but loyal to the last.' (Fox, *op cit*.) Let us add that – adhering to the broad definition of systematicity we have suggested best meets Laruelle's own standards – total a-systematicity cannot but become indiscernible from the nothing, the void. On our reading, Laruelle's importance lies in leveraging this insubstantiality in order to underline that, post-Kant and post-Marx, the 'how' of thinking can only be that of a *practice* or a 'doing', an action that is carried out in-the-last-instance '*according to*' the Real, rather than a 'thinking *about*'

only discoverable through a laborious, slow and gropingly proceeding investigation of the entailments and incompatibilities implicated in the occasional resources which happen to be 'lying around' in our current situation. This is of course not a suggestion likely to enthuse Laruelle, whose ultimate *bête-noir* is the 'Master-dialectician' Hegel.

By way of examples, two video works by Amanda Beech contain plenty of the multifaceted type of noise we have in mind. Firstly, in 'Gz and Hustlas' (2003)[84], a mash up of Apocalypse Now and Snoop Dogg, scenes from the film have been chopped up and edited together against the eponymous rap track, as if to construct a slick promotional clip. Instead of Snoop, we admire preening helicopters, puffed-up soldier-laden boats, and bridges being dynamited in synch with the snare. The artist has filmed the movie playing on her own TV, so the quality of the image is degraded by the electronic smudge of fuzzy pixels. But there is also an enormous amount of systemic and narrative noise. The globe-trotting machinery of military power is shoved in our face, and one is revolted, and at the same time, *thrilled* by the ludicrous, but somehow apt, surfeit of machismo, Realpolitik, and sheer blockbuster entertainment, all of which adds up to a repellently *jouissif* contradictory entanglement in capital-power, made a liile bit more explicit.

Secondly, 'Sanity Assassin'[85]. Creeping zooms upon an opulent but stark Californian interior, with grand piano and floral arrangements, but also on clandestine masonic paneled ceilings; rough side-of-the-freeway landscape glimpses; the inky infinity of interstellar space, with some kind of chemical snow falling, or architectural models in sharp relief in the foreground, gliding with utilitarian efficiency in and out of shot; floating: what appear to be spaceships, made of curious oblong surfaces plastered with homey wall-paper, and rendered in low- to mid- fidelity CGI.

Gain corporate enfranchisement, ushered into mahogany chambers behind closed doors? Or pursue public transparency in circulating through municipal precincts? Which is better? Upon what can I fall back to help me decide? The work enacts the deprivation of any would-be metaphysically-given pointers by juxtaposing and superimposing narratively uncanny (in line with our own argument, *not ontologically* uncanny) cosmic intimations of the acephalic modality

---

substantial objects. But if his performance-theoretical constructivist practices where really deprived of *all* criteria of selection, would they be as interesting as they in fact are?

[84] This video work is not available to be viewed online, but others by the artist are, at: http://www.amandabeech.com.

[85] Beech, 'Sanity Assain', 2010. http://amandabeech.com/works/sanity-assassin/.

of indivision beside normatively grasped, desire-baiting social conundrums. However, as the sci-fi-utopian charge of interstellar space grabs us propositionally-conceptually – as does the very notion that (the notion of) modal indivision is in play –, we are dealing here with the *concept of* outer space and its attendant culturally sedimented baggage. The unease felt in face of the work's contradictions is *social*.

Laruelle would not be happy with this talk of contradictions. He moves from his characterisation of the Real as non-consistent to the assertion that arbitrariness and contingency – the non-standard attack-dogs – will clamp their teeth into, trip up, and drag away into the One *any* reasoned selection of a principle or reference point (be it 'capitalism' or 'pop music' or 'the supermarket in Chipping Norton') for the organization of the provisional horizon of totality necessary to allow specific contradictions to show up *as* contradictions in the first place – i.e., as pairs of *contesting*, mutually incompatible commitments laying claim to the *same object* as each other, the location of which object will require a unifying context or co-ordinate scheme by which to gauge commitment-claims. Even the most self-consciously makeshift and temporary orienting framework, provisionally deployed as a ladder to be swiftly kicked away, will find its guiding-star principle sliced away by him from the system of relations centring it as pole. At his hands the key framework-idea will be directly and 'brutally' unilateralized by its irreversible, non-dialectical distinguishment from the degree-zero of the hypercomplete (non-)void – with which 'Man-in-person' qua finite actor will then be taken by Laruelle to be inalienably identical –, in precisely the same way as will be any of the subordinate terms which the key framework-idea was supposed to organize.

5. *The non-givenness of incommensurability, and non-logic*

It can be concluded that Laruellean unilateralization unblocks an obstruction to philosophical and artistic activity by showing that *nothing* in radical immanence qua radical immanence can furnish any criterion for success. The deprivation of any short-circuit between the Real and the conditioned for Laruelle liberates determinate singularities from smothering envelopment by what is for him that otiose extra layer of philosophical mediation forcibly commensurating them – be they 'concrete' forms *or* 'abstract' ones – with arbitrarily decided-upon metaphysical yardsticks. The slick but vicious circularity of philosophical auto-sufficiency is thereby broken and dislocated.

We would like to suggest that two conclusions should be drawn from this. Firstly, we would like to suggest that philosophy, science, and art must be seen to be labouring under the necessarily unmitigated charge of an effortful experimentation, investigating the world through hypothesis-testing and the setting and resetting of revisable axioms. This is our attempted dialectical twist on non-standard philosophy's anti-dialectical dismemberment of terms from relations. And secondly, – a slightly more Laruellean claim, though not straightforwardly so – we

would like to suggest that philosophy's insufficiency to definitively patch up its own blindspots entails that incommensurabilities – which are, qua species of *anomaly*, necessary in order to be able to kick against false engluements of totality – have to be *constructed*, for, against what we have interpreted as Deleuze's metaphysical modal realism with respect to possibility, no reservoir of *prêt à porter* infinite incompossibilty will be found lying around ready to be leveraged in the Real.

The *fractal*, then, – the 'non-Mandelbrotian fractal' – can be read as the figure of a certain candidate for what the result of the default of substance might be judged to be: that of a *global indifferentiation*. It is Identical to itself and modally undivided across its phenomenally and logically broken scales and stratifications, but it no longer offers any simply given yardstick-criterion from which to infer the principles governing its (in effect) absolutely chaotic internal mappings.

However, the query we would like to address to Laruelle concerns the worry that this under-determined, blankly infinite complexity may after all harden into yet another precipitate halting point. To fractalize substance may be to get close to its definitive collapse. But does the Real conceived as inconsistent zero-degree, and supposed to dis-effectuate all relationality by using its quasi-neo-platonist dynamite to unglue the related terms from each other, really rule out the very possibility of non-substantial criteria for determinate truth regarding relationality? Are we satisfied that 'Real' is a synonym for 'unalienably finite'

Laruelle's achievement on our assessment is that of an innovative articulation of the concepts of identity and genericity which provides a boost to the familiar argument that 'that there is no (metaphysical) metalanguage': philosophy cannot ascend to some balcony overlooking the alleyway of thinking, and possessed of a lighting rig, from which to observe itself as in a transparent mirror, because philosophy *is* a movement of the concept and cannot 'exit from itself' and directly fuse itself with nature through an intellectual intuition. This demonstration activates the absolutely universal genericity of conceptuality and the conditioned-mediated as such, because the negation of the attempt at a synoptic overview of thought by thought also says 'No!' to a non-thought which could *cancel* the 'reality' pertaining to thought-determinacies, including that of illusions or hallucinations, or cloned indiscernibles[86].

[86] In this connection, Laruelle's treatment of Identity interestingly – if orthogonally – *will* (probably) construe mathematical truths as absolutizable. Mathematical determinacies are in Laruelle's eyes nothing other than Identical-to-themselves, recalling Leibniz's proposal that cloned triangles are both numerically distinct *and* Identical. For Laruelle's own take on 'cloning' see Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Rubczak & Smith, London/NY: Bloomsbury, 2013 [1996], 185-188.

However, does using hypercompleteness to block the effectivity of reason's relationality-adjudicating decisions not amount to employing a logical determination, derived through a logical operation, to annual the possibility of logical operations? Does Laruelle fall back despite himself onto substance by substantializing the logical determination he has moments before used to shatter substance, obtaining what should, by his own lights, amount to a halting point against *Aufhebung* mortgaged to auto-unveiling sufficiency?

Laruelle importantly affirms the *separation* of thought and nature, but he then shifts this separation and recodes it as a separation between finitude and a dismissed infinity. His motivation is to preserve the not-decided-upon – the bit of nature in the ideally determined – from having its autonomy, and its heteronomy-with-respect-to-the-ideal, removed from it by idealist hubris. Decision presupposes a not-decided-upon. But we are not obliged to accept his *oppositive exclusion* of the finite's Other – the infinite, the self-relating – from it, from the finite. The Hegelian will not accept that the separation as regards ideality and its Other must accommodate itself to the principle of non-contradiction as to an exterior stipulation – isn't the point that of getting rid of this bad type of exteriority? – with the same going for the distinction between the finite and the infinite (a point we will study in Chapter 6). That Laruelle staples 'finite' to 'real' leaves non-standard philosophy unable to say anything at all about thought's Other[87]: the separation between thought and its Other shifts into a separation between finite somethingness and a blankly sequestered nothingness. But the problem for the Hegelian (or for many post-Hegelians) will be that here the rejection of a *contradictory* coincidence *of separation and unseparation* has not been properly motivated. Furthermore, does thematizing 'identity qua identity' not already involve a relating of this determination (that of identity) to itself, which relating is already an instance of self-relating negativity? The Kantian will deny that it does, because, pledged to non-contradiction, Kant accounts for the synthetic unity of apperception through the '"I think" which accompanies all of my representations' in a hard-and-fast exteriority to the content represented. But for Hegel this exteriority is question-begging because the self-sufficient non-contradictoriness of the thing-itself, which holds the 'I think' in a quasi-

[87] Which is not the case for that other thinker of Identity, Schelling, who speaks of thought's Other as the 'unprethinkable' in order to then give an account of this Other as nature and force – albeit that the Hegelian will find faults in this that are in some ways parallel to those she will find in Laruelle. Feuerbach, a critic of Hegel, can nonetheless still be said to be Hegelian or post-Hegelian, certainly in that he does give a determinate relational account of ideality's Other, through the communally shaped element of 'sensuous practice', and, with some caveats, we will in this study go on to claim partially Hegelian or post-Hegelian status for Marx and Engels.

metaphysical separation from this thing-itself, is a presupposition too far[88]. In Chapter 6 we will argue that contradictory negative self-relatingness need not entrain the afflatus of infinity which is so rebarbative to Laruelle, proposing that Hegel possesses the resources to desubstantialize both finitude and infinity such as to render each of these polarities, taken in a non-mediated isolation, abstract and quite unglamorous.

6. *A superposition: inverted desire and pure clone*

'*The generic subject derives* […] *from the transcendental subject as symptomal occasion.*'[89]

---

[88] In this passage from the *Logic* we see Hegel outlining the contradictory opaque separation *and porous unseparation* of thinking and its Other, and thereby *raising the problem of the 'ought'*, through the use of some technical terms which we will clarify as we proceed from this point (Hegel, *Logic*, 96):

> the human being is himself thinking, he *exists* as thinking, thought is his concrete existence and actuality; and, further, since thinking is in his existence and his existence is in his thinking, thinking is *concrete*, must be taken as having content and filling; it is rational thought and as such the *determination* of the human being. But even this determination is again only *in itself*, as an *ought*, that is to say, it is, together with the filling embodied in its in-itself, in the form of an in-itself in general *as against* the existence which is not embodied in it but still lies outside confronting it, immediate sensibility and nature.

And, elucidating upon his own dialectical conception of what 'determination' in fact is, in a manner to be unpacked in Chapter 6 (*ibid.*, 95):

> Determination is affirmative determinateness; it is the in-itself by which a something abides in its existence while involved with an other that would determine it, by which it preserves itself in its self-equality, holding on to it in its being-for-other.

In an interview Laruelle comments (Laruelle, 'I am a collider of concepts, not a dialectician', interview with *Philosophie Magazine*, February 2015, trans. Timothy Lavenz; my interpositions):

> The formula [non-philosphy] was [when first presented by him around 1980] perceived to be an insult, even a matricide against philosophy. But it was already circulating in the great epoch of German philosophy, between Fichte and Hegel, and around Schelling. It served as a war-machine for all those who were opposed to idealism.

However, if we do not rule out contradiction we may no longer view materialism vs idealism as an either-or choice.

[89] Laruelle, *Philosophie non-standard. Générique, quantique, philo-fiction*, Paris: Kimé, 2010, 159.

A final upshot of Laruelle's intervention into post-Kantian philosophy which we wish to embrace is that we cannot take for granted our own theories about how *subjectivity* works nor about how the 'subject' works (for example, as relay of lack in the Lacan of the 1950s; or as selector of affirmation in Deleuze's Nietzsche; *or through the machinery of aprioricity in Kant himself*). When we approach these theories for a first assessment, their immediate seductive glimmer needs to be disenchanted, 'frozen' or unilateralized, and, until we have been able to analyse, justify, and mediate them, treated as *objects* which we have constructed: shoved over onto the side of the object, rather as in Quantum Mechanics wave and particle – *and in a sense the observer too* – are superposed. The subject-of-observation is in-the-first-instance oblivious as to why its subjective activity determines the collapse of wave to atom. Laruelle's Real is this irreversible opacity: 'If the radicalized generic possesses a type of universal non-relation, this is none other than unilaterality'.[90]

However, to reiterate what it is that we wish to reject in non-standard philosophy: doesn't *simply* crushing compulsion, the will or desire, and the gap between the *is* and the *ought* into just-yet-more-multiples-without-multiplicity – in the first instance, the 'last instance', and any other instances – require re-inflating thought's non-sufficiency into a question-beggingly *sufficient* sledgehammer?[91] And does this not infringe the 'sterile'[92] neutrality of the Real with a supposedly *necessary* indifferentiation of subject-acts and object-models? Our suggestion in issuance of this Chapter is instead that of an *epistemic* parallax or unsynthesizable split and superposition between the view-point of desire, compulsion and the *ought*, on the one hand, and, on the other, the viewpoint of acephalic regularities: undead not-decided-upon meaningless spatio-temporal patterns.

Non-philosophical practice is *supposed to be* 'non-Gödelian'[93], avowing that it wants to refuse to reify logico-axiomatic incompleteness, in any metaphysico-ontological register, into a mystifiable 'hole' – a jibe which seems to be targerted against Lacanianism, whether ultimately justly or not… and if this is a blanket generalization, I would say not. If incompleteness should

---

[90] François Laruelle, *Introduction aux sciences génériques*, Paris: Pétra, 2008, 51.

[91] Indeed, in the overarching argument here presented we will rather tend to agree with Mladen Dolar's take, that 'to recur to multiplicity is usually rather a way to avoid tensions and contradictions by relegating them to multiplicity, thus avoiding the break and the cut (the negative one, as it were) which subtends it.' (Dolar, 'Of Drives and Culture', *Problemi International* vol. 1 no. 1, 2017, 55-79, 77.)

[92] *Ibid.* 53.

[93] Laruelle, *Introduction aux sciences génériques*, 62.

not be arbitrarily absolutized, nor should hypercompleteness – and the same goes for production and aridity.

To talk about *error* or *wrongness* is already to make a distinction between form and content which implies accepting the real effectivity of relationality. And it is also already to raise the question of universality and particularity and their mediation, as well as the question of time and temporality. To accept that stains are relational implies accepting the possible effectivity of their relations with non-stains. Hence it is, first of all, with a view to a *dialectical* treatment of sense-perceptible determinacies that the next two Chapters take as their point of departure a critical reading of a text from an early stage in the trajectory of Theodor W. Adorno, a trajectory leading to a *negative dialectics*.

Section II
Breaking the Magic Circle

Chapter 3
Towards an Anti-Mythical-Givenist Compossibilization of Adorno's 1938 Theses on Music and the Commodity-Form

The dustiness of the favoured examples and its blanket refusal of conciliation with the commercially lucrative are not the problem with Adorno's 1938 essay 'On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening'[94]. Rather, its failure is that it does not consistently see through its own perspicacious dialectization of the Freudian drive with contingent social, political, and sonic conditions, stopping before the threshold at which the particularity of its examples would be rendered irrelevant in the universal of determinate negation.

By the lights of Adorno's own acknowledgement of the irreducibility for experience of mediation – which, from the cognitive perspective it (mediation) furnishes for itself, cannot but be viewed as *transcendental* – the effectivity of the drive can only be deduced from the incompleteness, or non-totality, of reason itself. But the ensuing, highly important, desubstantialization of musical construction in its contingent entanglement with enjoyment (to take the liberty – to be propped up – of using the word in a Lacanian sense) is not matched in the essay when it lapses back into false immediacy with respect to pleasure and use-value.

The argument presented in this chapter will be that, alongside Lacan, Wilfrid Sellars' critique of the 'intellectualist variant' of what he calls the 'Myth of the non-categorial Given' should be applied to Adorno's early theses as a razor permitting his own best early insights to be separated from those claims which threaten to undermine them. This approach will allow for certain non-trivial interrogations to be launched in the following chapter, Chapter 4, concerning Adorno's later deployment, in his own fully-elaborated '*negative* dialectics', of the concept of 'non-identity', and – putting to work the compossibilized theses – on and around temporality and time, and the issue of novelty.

Part of the upshot will be that sublimation can never avail itself of *any* (quasi-simultaneous, or, for that matter, ex-post facto) verificational yardstick or simply given index as to its own 'non-ersatz' fulfilment. The idea that it could have *any* stable pre-given ends or criteria at all (beyond skeletally formal meta-shapes such as the broken circle) is precisely an instance of the (transcendental) obsessional or perverted neurosis proper to reason itself swelling up so as to drag upon neuroticized reason's own other hysterically forward-driven vector of negating discovery. This necessitates that sublimation must involve the prosecution of the desubstantialization of the concept of sublimation: the nullification of itself qua objectivated per

[94] Theodor W. Adorno, 'On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening', in eds. Andrew Arato & Eike Gebhardt, *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, NY: Continuum, 1985 [1938]; 270-299. Henceforth FCM.

se *for contemplative representation,* a closed circle into which Adorno views the commodity as transfixing it.

1. *Orpheus quashed*

Positioning his intervention from the outset within a psychoanalytic framework, Adorno defines the core function of music to be that of arousing and then attenuating the brute drives, unleashing them in order that they be tamed.

> Complaints about the decline of musical taste begin only a little later than mankind's twofold discovery, on the threshold of historical time, that music represents at once the immediate manifestation of impulse and the locus of its taming. It stirs up the dance of the Maenads and sounds from Pan's bewitching flute, but it also rings out from the Orphic lyre, around which the visions of violence range themselves, pacified.[95]

This already implies Freudian sublimation as *free* and *constructive*, picking up and exploring an occasional material, here sound. Thus we are situating ourselves in a modality, or upon a level, of *formal* constructability. The assumption that will be elucidated is that the formal properties of sound can be discovered, ramified, arranged, built into each other, and glued together: constructed. In a word, if compulsion is to be pacified by being put to work, along the lines of Orpheus, rather than momentarily extirpated and quashed in a Bacchic *passage à l'acte*, this necessarily implies both a plasticity in the occasional material and a degree of formal control of that plasticity.

According to Adorno, under late capitalism's diversion-crammed commercial regime, commodity fetishism is such that no one is any longer capable of being entertained. Nor *a fortiori* does anyone escape the blockage of the ability to *freely, open-endedly* sublimate the drives – i.e., the ability to sublimate them at all.

> [I]t can be asked whom music for entertainment still entertains. Rather, it seems to complement the reduction of people to silence, the dying out of speech as expression, the inability to communicate at all. It inhabits the pockets of silence that develop between people moulded by anxiety, work and undemanding docility. Everywhere it takes over, unnoticed, the deadly sad role that fell to it in the time of and the specific situation of the silent films. It is perceived purely as background. If

[95] FCM, 270.

> nobody can any longer speak, then certainly nobody can any longer listen.[96]

Before asking for Adorno's reasoning, let us note that the answer to the question 'Why not?' will here, by definition, be determined by its entanglement with the answer to another question. Namely, the question of what, more precisely, counts for Adorno as a 'good' expression, an Orphic expression that will satisfy the criteria of *genuine* expression, as opposed to being a mere mortified, fetishistic babble, equivalent – as a type of cowed and docile non-speech – to silence. That is: what is involved in a successful sublimation?

2. *Anti-Pythagoreanism*

As already glimpsed, for Adorno successful musical sublimation is conceptual and 'synthetic'. The musical sequence is, minimally, *cognized* – that is, *cognitively* constructed – and, implicitly – a point regarding which he is problematically ambiguous – seems also for its construction necessarily to require rational commitment to revocable-revisable regulative principles. Adorno casts back to an earlier sequence for his exemplar, finding it in what he calls 'the great music of the West', which turns out to consist in the relatively brief time-window of the generation of Haydn and Mozart. Any accusation of elitism will not be spared careful scrutiny of the sophisticated non-vulgar Marxist explanation given for this selection, an explanation which provides a certain mobile blueprint for musical sublimation. Its non-vulgarity lies in an acute negotiation between a stringently cold-eyed, but brisk, quasi-mathematical Kantian formal transcendentalism, and the Hegelian social thawing of this.[97] 'Thawing' in that, in disagreement

---

[96] FCM, 271.

[97] Olivier Tinland convincingly shows that the idea that Hegel is opposed as an enemy to Kant because he disapproves of the latter's transcendental critique of the 'Old metaphysics' is a misapprehension (cf. Tinland, *L'idéalisme hégélien*, Paris: CNRS, 2013, 50-53). Dionysis Christias is in accord with Tinland and, we believe, with Adorno, in the tenor of his summary (Christias, 'Thinking with Sellars and Beyond Sellars on the Relations Between Philosophy and the History of Philosophy', in eds. Luca Corti & Antonio Nunziate, *Sellars and the History of Philosophy*, NY: Routledge, 2018, 257-276, accessed online at https://www.academia.edu/35388177/Thinking_With_Sellars_and_Beyond_Sellars_on_the_Relations_Between_Philosophy_and_the_History_of_Philosophy, 4):

> Building on this Kantian critique of metaphysics, Hegel went even further and took Kant to task for not seeing that the 'transcendental illusion' in question could find expression even in philosophy's conception of the source of its *own* doctrines. There was no reason to suppose that the doctrines of Kantian critical philosophy were themselves a product of pure reason (as Kant believed). Another way to make this point is by pointing out that Kant's insight that we do not have any privileged insight into the fundamental

with Pythagoras, music slides into a dialectic with tranches of the non-musical which are also non-mathematical. The strata in play will turn out to be *socio-political*, concerning what Hegel calls 'shapes of spirit' – forms of collective self-consciousness – and also concerning what Freud and later Lacan name the complexes and the phantasy: the quasi-theatrical staging or schematisation or mapping of the individual human's relation with other humans, which is to say, the staging of her own non-self-sufficient placement within the field of speaking and doing.

What is great about the great music

> is shown as a force for synthesis. Not only does the musical synthesis preserve the unity of appearances and protect it from falling apart into diffuse culinary moments, but in such unity, in the relation of particular moments to an evolving whole, there is also preserved the image of a social condition in which above those particular moments of happiness would be more than mere appearance.[98]

At the heart of successful musical sublimation, as its *sine qua non*, is the mereological tracking of the relations between part and whole, breaking the isolation of moments by shuttling back and forth between these and a shifting, provisional totality constructed by the listener or composer – by the constructor – which provisional totality is progressively modified in function of the properties of the succession of moments. This labour of schematization can only be the work of the Kantian cognitive apparatus, broadly interpreted. Scattered parts and their relations with unified wholes belong to the pure categories of the understanding[99], and the succession of

---

nature of reality also applies to Kant's own system: we do not have any privileged insight into the fundamental nature of the mind (thought, reason), either. Kantian critical philosophy seemed in this way to fail to live up to its own standards of self-critical reflection.

[98] FCM, 273.

[99] Trying to look for parts and wholes within 'pure intuition' (abstractly isolated in a thought-experiment) can only lead one into interminable series of augmenting or diminishing degrees, never reaching either of the sought-after instances. As Reza Negarestani explains, from a Kantian perspective 'time and space are alike such that their division can be continued indefinitely without yielding us simple elements. Points are not isolable elements, but merely boundaries, while augmentation by successive addition can likewise be carried on indefinitely without yielding us the cosmic whole we are trying to encompass […]' (Negarestani, video recording of a seminar presentation. Lecture course for the New Centre for Research & Practice, 'Kant's Circle of Revenge: A close encounter with the *Critique of Pure Reason*', 12th November 2017.) Part-whole relations are 'added' to fuzzy (but not non-cognitive) sensible spatio-temporal 'stuffs' by the

fleeting but specifically differentiated moments cannot be hypostatized into any substantial given, because ongoing construction of the revisable whole retroactively transforms the status and formal role of the moments – as well as transforming *their very properties*: because, step by step, angles of investigatory attack upon the sonic material retroactively show up in light of, or are obstructed by, the accruing features of the plastic-synthetic whole.[100] This goes hand in hand with the fact that *time*, qua form of inner sense, is for Kant itself a mediating 'pure' (i.e. transcendental, a priori – be it mutable in shape or no) form of intuition, and not a property of the thing-in-itself. Formal plasticity, and partially controllable but also open-ended constructability, necessarily imply – if an unmaterialist Leibnizian metaphysical convenience is to be avoided, as well as an erroneous hypostatization of the 'matter'-of-the-last-instance of sensation in its concept – that we must honour a sharp split between phenomenon and noumenon, slick with underdetermination, and hence that we honour the irreducibility of transcendental mediation.[101]

---

faculty of categorial understanding. From this it follows that parts and wholes – qua adrift from the forms, or inherent domains, of sensibility – are a plastically reconfigurable moveable feast.

[100] For example, Adorno highlights Alban Berg's innovations in the quasi-geometrical implication of the element of rhythm in compositional structure, from the building of a scene out of a series of variations upon a single rhythm in Berg's opera *Wozzeck*, to the development of this procedure into an over-arching retroactive form in *Lulu* (cf. Adorno, 'Alban Berg.' In *Figures sonores. Écrits musicaux I*. Trans. Marianne Rocher-Jacquin & Claude Maillard. Geneva: Contrechamps, 2006 [1978/chapter 1956], 69-78, 70.).

[101] In *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique. Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies* (trans. Willis Domingo, Cambridge/Malden: Polity, 2013), a critical study of Husserl first drafted in Oxford from 1934-37, Adorno writes (155-156):

> Husserl falls into the difficulties of perception theory because, like Kant's successors, he wished to divest himself of *hyle* as an element heterogenous to consciousness. Thus among the impulses of his philosophy the idealistic one gains the upper hand. But the thesis of the interlacing of perception with sensation also makes clear the knowledge that even sensation does not generate that absolute first which Husserl's epistemology seeks. Indeed sensation, the lowest level of the traditional hierarchy of mind, as of the Husserlian phenomenologically pure consciousness, marks a threshold. The material element simply cannot be rooted out. Bordering on physical pain and organic desire, it is a bit of nature which cannot be reduced to subjectivity.
>
> But sensation does not become pure immediacy through the somatic moment. The insistence on the mediacy of each and every immediate is the direct model of dialectical thought as such, but also of materialistic thought insofar as it determines the social pre-formedness of contingent individual experience. But dialectic, therefore, has no materialistic foundation in sheer sensation, for sensation, despite its somatic essence, is completely diluted of full reality through the reduction to subjective immanence. If it were

3. *Pleasure, timbre, decision*

Moving towards Hegel, this rigorous separation of malleably constructible sonorous form-material from henceforth epistemically-cognitively voided, ungrounding in-itself allows Adorno to make three dialectically intricated points regarding how his formal definition of the structure of music – speaking in the most skeletal meta-generic terms; those which distinguish it from non-music – will turn out to be of a piece with its *critical* socio-political role.

i.) Firstly, the issue of the role of pleasure is raised. If 'culinary moments' are not to be left isolated, gobbled up in a sybaritic bad repetition, Adorno nonetheless views it as a fatal mistake to altogether ban 'sensual gaiety'[102]. He rejects Socrates's outlawing from the *Republic* of the lamenting Lydian modes, along with the Ionian modes, which are said by the Athenian to be excessively relaxed and 'soft', distastefully conducive to drunkenness and idleness. That the *Republic* will allow only modes imitative of the tone of courageous and steadfast resolve on the battlefield or in facing defeat, wounds, death, or other misfortunes is viewed – not entirely unreasonably – by Adorno, he makes clear, as similarly as misguided as the unsmiling apparatchik hoping to discipline the citizenry out of existence through relentless issuance of arbitrary

---

> true that material reality extends into so-called 'consciousness' only as sensation and 'sense-certainty', then all the more would objectivity be turned into a categorial performance of the subject, a 'supplement', at the cost of the concept of a social reality prescribed to the isolated subject and comprehending it.

In other words, the 'matter of sensation' *in itself* is neither an empirically intuitable instance, nor a constraint (other than trivially), nor a furnisher of criteria for successful sublimation – its positing as enabling material-biological condition of thought and desire is justified downstream in the dialectic for the reason that any other hypothesis will imply solipsism, or other metaphysically question-begging presuppositions. This is not for a second to deny that musical materials are *perceptual*, although Adorno's argument is that they are not *only* perceptual. The strongly materialist axiom here is that 'matter' needs to be transliterated into the blindspot of the dialectic which propels it forwards precisely by pulling the foundational-substantial rug out from under it, an ungrounding that can itself only be accomplished dialectically. Whatever else 'nature' is, it is an *epistemic* black-hole – which cannot be confused for a *substantial* one. *Hyle* for the dialectician is a name for the default of any foundational absolute first, which default is coterminous with the lack of any substantial yardstick of commensuration that could serve as a sticking-plaster for inconsistencies and contradictions in our understanding of the situation in which we find ourselves.

[102] FCM, 272.

statutory.[103] Those pompous Victorian diatribes that would berate immediate enthrallment in sensory stimulus as superficial and indicative of 'declining taste' are scorned, Adorno viewing this type of enjoyment (it could however be more precisely defined by him) as something that cannot simply be dodged. He refuses the blackmail of: *either* hair-trigger drive-catharsis *or* conceptual patience. It is pointed out to the contrary that such tasty morsels as the momentary rapture of harmonic phrasal pathos have been (in principle can be) dialectically prolonged and put to work. In 'the great music', desecration of the atavistic phantasy of a self-authenticating artistic Absolute was furnished precisely by not-yet-reflexively-mediated enjoyment. In this case, musical construction was de-sutured from the bourgeois neo-classical imago of auto-bestowing perfection, and also from the deadlocked hysterical demand for superlative multi-layered complexity of the late baroque's polyphonic contrapuntal car-crash 'I want it all and I want it now!', precisely by *impulsive knee-jerk pleasure*, 'the profanation which frees it from its magic circle': 'Haydn's choice of the "gallant" in preference to the learned'.[104] This instance of drive-

[103] Although Adorno skips over the detail that Socrates is in fact willing to also let slide past the censors the rather less belligerent and more tepid mode imitative of

> peaceful, unforced, voluntary action, persuading someone or asking a favour of god in prayer or of a human being through teaching and exhortation, or, on the other hand, of someone submitting to the supplications of another who is teaching him and trying to get him to change his mind, and who, in all these circumstances, is acting with moderation and self-control, not with arrogance but with understanding, and is content with the outcome. (*Republic* 399, trans. G. M. A. Grube & C. D. C. Reeve, in ed. John M. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1997, 971-1223, 1036.)

[104] FCM, 272. The 'gallant style' refers to the sonata form, which establishes a theme that it then repeats through a cycle of variations. The theme is experimentally, exploratorily deployed *qua theme* without other lines being layered on top of it. Adorno's exposition is elliptical, but our own active reconstruction has him saying something along the following lines. The saturation and exhaustion of polyphony (counterpoint) causes it – it *specifically* – to descend into a cloistered puzzle-solving in the name of complexity for complexity's sake. This is one case of the general, ever-looming meta-dead-end shape formalised as the closing of an ideological-phantasmatic 'magic circle'. The magic circle installs the unconscious illusion that the criteria of the current contingent generic approach are auto-sufficient, metaphysically justified, and *infinitely efficacious*. The closing of the magic circle is a problem because it prevents new discoveries from being made; hence it must be sliced open in order for musical sublimation to continue. The peculiarities of the 'ivory-tower-ish' complacency (is this not indeed a case of what Lacan will name the 'university discourse'?) here needing to be punctured entail that the 'conviviality' and 'courtliness' of the sonata form – inseparable from the pleasure it takes in 'sensory stimulation' – is appropriate to dislodge *this specific* ideological-phantasmatic vicious circle. As we will see, this will not be the case with the commodity-form's circle.

enjoyment, involuntary and, as it were, 'unthinking' (which terms Adorno in these passages is sophisticated and consistent enough to articulate as irreflexive, in the sense of non-deliberated, *but still cognitive*), could then itself be reflexively put-at-arm's-length, such that its own peculiarities, not only, or not simply, formal, but also *including the conceptualisation of its socio-political valence,* themselves became occasional material for schematisation through construction. On the one hand, the specificities proper to the particular modality of automatistic satisfaction in question, through their function of breaking certain specific loops of smug illusory artistico-metaphysical self-sufficiency, thereby – thanks to and through their success in this very operation – lend themselves to be intellectually ramified: it being here a question of 'sensory stimulation as the gate of entry into the harmonic and eventually the coloristic dimensions'[105]. While, on the other hand, the very (conceptual) issue of partial particularity as against totality is, by means of this dislocation, also thematised and problematized, *politically and socially*.

ii.) Indeed, secondly, and crucially, it is *only* by insisting upon synthesising fleeting shards into a whole overstepping the sum of its parts that musical construction can take a critical stance towards socio-political conditions. It in fact follows from the presuppositions in play that music can't help *always* saying something political, even and especially when it is oblivious to the fact that it is doing this. If partial moments end up being isolated into a deadlocked repetition, then from this one learns, albeit obscurely, that something is wrong. Adorno's Kantianism implies that reason must have the spontaneity, in the sense of the 'empty' freedom of being forced to set its own limits, that entails that it will always – at least in principle – be able to recognise its own failure to synthesize *as a failure*. When the musically constructive force for synthesis does manage to cobble together a provisional totality, what is thereby unavoidably put into question is social totality: its incompleteness, shortfall of justice, and the imperative to transform it.

---

[105] FCM, 272. The 'colouristic dimensions' are the dimensions of tonal colour or timbre, which is to say those audible properties of sound not describable as pitch or loudness. Adorno's point is that the generic constraints constitutive of polyphony precluded any concerted focus upon timbre for its own sake, being based on superimposed strata of lines creating shifting pitch relations. By the time that counterpoint had ran out of new constructions and was ossifying into complacency, 'pleasant' euphony *just so happened*, in this precise context, to function as a sufficiently derailing, or rerailing, jolt. Euphony disturbed polyphony's complacency, and in such a way that the resulting organising principle – that of the sonata form – then developed through a feedback loop with the sonic affordances which thereby happened to be made apparent and stressed or foregrounded in this 'pleasant' format. It is to be noted that an interest in timbre is not uncharacteristic of post-serialist experimental music, and that it is a dimension lying on the dividing line between music and non-music which also cuts across the degrees of distinction between sound and noise.

To reiterate the already-quoted statement, 'in such unity, in the relation of particular moments to an evolving whole, there is also preserved the image of a social condition in which above those particular moments of happiness would be more than mere appearance.'[106] This is the anti-Pythagorean Hegelian thawing. Concrete freedom is not a self-emanating substance; materialist probity dictates that it is constrained and enabled by determinate conditions. To the best of our knowledge we are not high-tech aliens plugged into a computationally exorbitant negentropic simulator. If synthetic musical construction shatters the sheen of auto-substantiality accruing to the partial stimulus – by meta-reflexively conceptualising it, and by thereby interrogating its conditionality as heteronomously determined 'mere appearance' (i.e., as Kantian-Hegelian phenomenal occurrence, *Shein*, in need of mediation for its concretisation) – then a better bet than the social level for postulation of the key conditioning platform-locus – queasy silicon-valley elisions of cause and norm being incoherent – is unlikely to be found.

The constructability of totality necessarily asks the question of social totality, because sociality *simply is* – on pain of solipsism or metaphysical dogmatism – the arena not only of the playing out of the chicanery and picaresque trajectory of desire, but also of the institution of the conceptual mediations which enable and constrain this latter, as well as thought. Or, more precisely, for Adorno, and for this reason, the fact of the constructability of musical wholes can, and *should* or *must – ought to –* ask the question of social totality. One of the problems he is tackling is that of determining why, manifestly, it is on the most part not understood in this way.

But the point to be emphasised here is that *how exactly* contingent automatisms and specific social conditions could (perhaps) be leveraged and overcome, in order to (maybe) transform the quasi-totality that is society-in-actuality, is not determinable a priori in the abstract – not before entering into a practice with the available occurrent materials, which practice is not to be substantially reified, because the occurrent materials are always transcendental-formal-categorial. The transcendental is social – which is knowable only as a dialectical conclusion (Hegel). 'Until the end of prehistory,' – that is, until the advent of communism –

> the musical balance between partial stimulus and totality, between expression and synthesis, between the surface and the underlying, remains as unstable as the moments of balance between supply and demand in the capitalist economy.[107]

[106] FCM, 273.

[107] FCM, 273.

Among the meanings of 'unstable' here is a general valence implying that no metaphysical a priori ever furnishes the criteria for successful sublimation, and, by extension, that the dialectic peculiar to commodity-fetishism is such that, in principle, any recipe that may have once proved fecund for loosening its neurotising grip or swatting this out of the way will quickly need to be torn up. Hence the process of working out and discovering what in a given situation may be the criteria for a successful sublimation will be strewn with unpredictability and error: unstable. However, successful negation of old forms by new ones (which is required for free and open-ended sublimation) needs as such to be *determinate*, and the tatters of the old recipes therefore do tell now-working constructors something important. '*The Magic Flute*, in which the utopia of the Enlightenment and the pleasure of a light opera comic song precisely coincide, is a moment by itself', because *The Magic Flute* itself would soon fall foul of the commodity-form's reificatory seizure of pleasure. But this means that we now *know* that '[a]fter *The Magic Flute* it was never again possible to force serious and light music together.'[108] With this example, the discussion of the role of pleasure sharpens and the problematic question-mark that has been hovering over it from the outset flares up.

Sublimation is by definition compulsive-compelled, putting the *drive* to work. But the type of partial drive-satisfaction proper to the momentary charms of harmonic pathos, the catchy riff, or rhythmic hypnosis, qua instances of 'pleasure', is proper to but one modality of the cashing out of the drive. If sublimation is also, by definition, conceptual-formal and synthetic, the question we are led to ask is that of whether 'pleasure' need necessarily remain within the ambit of sublimation at all, anywhere near its minimally fleshed-out definitional meta-criteria or its enabling conditions.

iii.) Thirdly, Adorno stresses the importance for musical construction that *individual decision* should gain the upper hand over collective conformism. His attack upon the 'perennial themes' of snobbish 'musical sermonising'[109] in the style of Socrates's puritanical moment or of the self-satisfied neo-classicist is not limited to a counter-affirmation of sensual gaiety in the 'great music'. It extends to a second counter-affirmation, still regarding this exemplar, of 'differentiating consciousness'[110], which for Adorno is invariably caricatured and berated by the snob-sermonists as a cult of personality. In Californian exile from National Socialist mass rallies, Adorno is measuredly celebratory of the predominance in the 'great music' of 'the unbridled

[108] FCM, 273.

[109] FCM, 272.

[110] FCM, 272.

person', ratifying Haydn's *choice* of the galant style precisely as a *reasoned* decision: 'Haydn's choice indeed, and not the recklessness of a singer with a golden throat or an instrumentalist of lip-smacking euphony.'[111] The temptations of either chalking this up to historical and biographical contingencies, thus explaining it away, or of viewing Adorno as having collapsed back into the type of bourgeois, deludedly self-sufficient individualism he is supposed to be attacking, would, while containing grains of truth, miss the point. As far as I can see, what is really is at stake here is the necessarily rational-normative character of musical construction. If this latter is always socio-politically conditioned, and if how it is to proceed is always entirely underdetermined by an epistemically voided in-itself (where, in pre-critical metaphysics, the matter of sound used to be), a lapse back into substantialism can only be avoided by conceiving among its conditions of possibility to be boundedness to revocable-revisable, forgeable rules (norms), and, concomitantly, capacities for logical inference regarding the possibility-space of the extant sound-framework and the affordances available for expanding this. As Inigo Wilkins writes, remarking upon the sentiment common among contemporary noise musicians and improvisers that refusing to rehearse or practise militates in favour of freedom and the abolition of traditional convention – a stance he traces back to the Jena romantics –,

> [t]he basis of this standpoint is the widely held belief that creative acts are opposed to rational decisions. This is a mischaracterisation of the relationship between reason and creativity that has a long and illustrious history. When reasoning is understood as embedded in social discursive practices, and when it is extended beyond deduction and induction to include the abductive generation of hypotheses, this opposition collapses.[112]

[111] FCM, 272-3.

[112] Inigo Wilkins, *Irreversible Noise: The Rationalisation of Randomness and the Fetishisation of Indeterminacy*, unpublished PhD thesis, Goldsmiths University of London, 2015; forthcoming as a monograph, Falmouth: Urbanomic, 210. Abductive inference is generally defined as inference to the best explanation. Thus *induction* is that subspecies of abduction which limits itself to the collection of statistical data in support of the 'likelihood' of its pre-given hypothesis-conclusions, hence lacking criteria for better and worse explanation. 'Abductive generation' for Wilkins here involves the *creation* of *new* hypotheses. What is at issue, regarding the work of improvisers in the mould of Fred Frith and Derek Bailey, is abduction as inference to the best strategy for asymptotically tending to avoid hackneyed idiomatic gestures, the means to which end will shift with the (socio-musical) context, perhaps only being discernible retroactively at a mid-point in the performance, if at all. Sellars classifies abduction with what he calls 'material inference', on which see Sellars, 'Inference and Meaning', *Mind* Vol. 62 No. 247, 1953, 313-338.

> [T]here are plentiful examples of theoretical abduction in the interaction of improvising musicians, as well as manipulative abductions in the exploration of their instruments. The work of an artist such as Fred Frith abounds in theoretical and manipulative abductions, the whole performance being structured round a careful avoidance of hackneyed idiomatic gestures and an elaboration of the sound-making capacities of the instrument beyond its traditional functioning (i.e. 'extended technique'). These performances may be highly unpredictable and non-repeatable, however this does not make them inviolable to science or to capital [...][113]

Certainly what we do not wish to propose would be the postmodern-Berkleyan-solipsistic metaphysics according to which material sound-properties would themselves be produced by subjective decisions. On the contrary, abductive inference generates hypotheses in the aim of overcoming obstacles and resistances in the expansion of the sound-field. We can stress, in agreement with Adorno, that the dialectic of musical construction is further complicated by factors which are political and social, for it transpires that it must seek an expansion that will, via determinate negation, unblock and overcome conditions which are specifically political-libidinal. The only reading of the 'unbridled person' and 'differentiating consciousness' consistent with Adorno's stringent transcendentalism is that reason's power of decision cannot ever be *causally* abrogated (eliminatively reduced) but must be *unconditional*, while the inferential procedures at its disposal must be formalized so that they can be limited to those avoiding a surreptitious short-circuit of transcendental form and substantial in-itself. If we lose unconditional (but as such *empty*: criterionless) *decision* then we lose open-ended constructability, and hence the very possibility of sublimation. Which does not mean that any second-guessing of the tacks that sublimation will need to take in any given contingent situation has thereby been legalised. From the Sellarsian-inferentialist perspective, where Adorno does indeed commit a bourgeois slippage is in superimposing the agent of decision neatly upon the empirical-civic 'individual': 'Haydn's choice indeed'. In music as elsewhere, the reasons behind the effectivity of breaking certain rules, sticking to others, and forging yet other new ones massively overspill the purview of the anecdotal person, as they are imbricated in complex and largely opaque ('noisy', if you will) socially instituted codes and contexts. These reasons are, in the first instance, neither transparent, nor

[113] Wilkins, *Irreversible Noise*, 204.

consciously explicit: decision can be unconscious (or more precisely, pre-conscious) without being irrational, and the exploration of a hunch for the sake of the pure drive-to-repetition or 'Bacchic' drive-to-noise may in fact end up being dialectically fruitful to Orpheus; the obscurity implied by the necessary enabling-constraining excess of non-transparent rules may necessitate experimentation to all intents and purposes resembling bad infinity. The unbridled person is the Sellarsian 'person'[114], decentred with respect to induction and phenomenological (reflexive verificational-circular) presence. That the drive's enjoyment of the symptom is irrational does not mean that the non-bourgeois, self-opaque agent of inference cannot rationally commit itself to strategies for ungluing and regluing this enjoyment wagered, off the back of *reasoning*, to be better strategies rather than worse ones. Adorno's premises in the opening pages of his essay should commit him to the in-principle revocability and revisability of *all and any* aspects of what is called 'music', in the service of using the drive against itself to unstick and separate itself from the symptom – i.e., from the knotting which fetters the expansion of freedom by tying the drive to a regime of satisfaction and anxiety enslaved to the commodity-form. Reason – the non-psychological, *functional* and therefore ultimately inhuman empty decider, which (nonetheless) in the case of humans can only be fed a determinate content to decide upon from the *dialectical* (ungrounded) perspective of the speaking animal – is enabled upon a stratum separate to that

[114] Sellars writes in his programmatic 1960 article 'Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man' (in Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality*, Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1991, 7-43, 16):

> when I say that the objects of the manifest image are primarily persons, I am implying that what the objects of this framework, primarily *are* and *do*, is what persons are and do. Thus persons are 'impetuous' or 'set in their ways'. They apply old policies or adopt new ones. They do things from habit or ponder alternatives. [...] For my present purposes, the most important contrasts are those between actions which are expressions of character and actions which are *not* expressions of character, on the one hand, and between habitual and deliberate actions, on the other. The first point I want to make is that only a being capable of deliberation can properly be said to act, either impulsively or from habit. For in the full and non-metaphorical sense an action is the sort of thing that can be done deliberately.

And he adds:

> it is important not to confuse between an action's being *predictable* and its being *caused* [...] most of the things people do are not things they are *caused* to do, even if what they do is highly predictable. For example: when a person has well-established habits, what he does is certain circumstances is highly predictable, but it is not for that reason *caused*. (*Ibid.*, 18.)

which dumps the inertial heaviness of enjoyment upon the speaking animal, and so can be leveraged by that animal to strategically shift this burden.[115] *Everything* here, in the ambit of musical construction, is in fact vulnerable to falling under the imperative of decision, insofar as it is *all normatively constructed* (i.e., constructed *with the help of* rules: rules broken and abandoned; new rules forged and set; abductive hypothesising) – all, save the drive itself, and the dead weight of the contingency of the situation which is the drive's occasional material: e.g., acephalic habit, which is to say, social convention; the non-reasonable facticity of our specific finite aural capacities, as they now stand. If it can be made explicit then it can be decided upon, and implicit in the foregoing is that part of music's role is to be a maker-explicit.

4. *Commodity fetishism and the value-form*

What then is it in late capitalism that strangulates sublimation such that 'nobody can any longer speak' and 'nobody can any longer listen'? The answer is commodity fetishism, but the pessimism of Adorno's diagnosis turns upon precisely how he understands this.

Adorno quotes Marx's definition of the fetish-character of the commodity as residing in the way it makes the social – and subjective, or intertwinedly-chiastically subjective-objective – character of production appear as a reified objective character stamped into labour's own product. This is a certain transcendentally inevitable and currently non-deliquescent error, which constitutes a sort of – at the very least provisional – deadlock, entailing drastic (but how drastic?) effective-practical consequences. Adorno in 1938 puts the stress on the fetish-character's aspect of compelled and uncontrollable veneration or 'worship', as external-exterior, of 'the thing made by oneself'[116]. And it is indeed clear in Marx that the commodity answers the producers' question as to their own relation with the sum-total of their own collective labour *per se* with the illusion of this *social relation* as pertaining not between people – the producers themselves – but between 'dead' things. If *use-values* are to be associated with praxes that are conducive to exploring and transforming the world – with open-ended making as an acting or doing – then the frozen thing-like character of the commodity-form – its reified thingly mode of function and 'mechanically'

[115] More precisely, it is for Lacan the incompleteness of reason itself which produces the cloying inertial conservatism of enjoyment – thus the latter supervenes upon the former, which (incompleteness) is also what pushes reason into the errancy of its own empty spontaneity. (More on this point below.)

[116] FCM 278. The aspect of the commodity-form's effectivity which will be principally treated in the following is but one of the transcendental illusions accruing to it, no doubt among others – namely, that pertaining to the phantasy and the symptom. That Adorno's treatment of the commodity-form's effectivity may in 1938 be problematically one-sided as regards the full dimensionality of that effectivity is an issue we will not tackle in any depth, but it is hoped that the analysis given might contribute to clearing the ground for the asking of this question, rather than to its obfuscation.

overdetermined closure; to which might be added the quasi-animistic hectoring with which it plagues its makers – is to be derived from (i.e., understood with reference to) a singular historical conjunction. Namely, the specific stage of the historically contingent stranglehold upon social form, in the production process and the reproduction process, that has been attained by the 'real abstraction' which is *exchange-value*. Exchange value is the universal equivalent or scale of commensuration which has, through its autonomization as coin-money and concentrated financial capital, allowed profit qua the extraction of surplus-value to accede to the effectivity of prime structuring social principle and prime principle shaping production. This 'value-form' thereby slips through the fingers of quasi-spontaneous control. Its autonomization is cemented – to what degree Adorno will adjudicate – by the libidinal-glue and desire-trap aspect of the commodity fetish. In the 1938 essay the consequences of Marx's account are drawn for, firstly, the faculty of cognitive synthesis between part and whole, and, secondly, for pleasure or enjoyment (terms which quickly come to cry out for a sharper separation along the Lacanian lines already hinted at). This is done in a highly suggestive manner, but one that problematically construes the fates of these two functions – cognitive synthesis and pleasure-enjoyment – as necessarily and irreversibly embroiled.

The starting point of Adorno's dialectic here is, indeed, the pleasure or enjoyment of rapturous sensorial-perceptual stimulus, which in his narrative, as we have seen, once upon a time – from Orpheus to the *style galant* – shattered the crushingly massive stolidity of the blinkered presupposition of a transcendent circle of musical perfection. Back then – to reiterate – sensorial gratification severed the assumption that what music is or should be is a simply given essence, and thereby broke the neurotic proscription against forward-compelled investigation of constructible sonic occurents and their possible social, libidinal, and cognitive valences. This deluded neurotic phantasy – no less possessed of serious potential effective consequence, qua phantasy, for its falsity – is not without structural isomorphy or analogy with the manifest (and for Adorno here, seemingly chronic) tendency towards shut-off circularity of the value-form in its relative (but for here less and less relative) autonomy. Let us postpone for now the central issue of the coherence, or lack thereof, of his early attribution of an achieved totalisation, and concomitantly ensuing cauterisation of free exploration, to the reconfiguring vector of the value-form under the phase of its *real subsumption* of the production process – 'real subsumption' being Marx's shorthand for the state of affairs wherein the form of exchange-value has become *de facto* engine-creator and re-shaper of socio-economic upheaval through the transformation of modes of production and the forced opening in favour of the reinvestment and concentration of capital of new terrains of marketization. I would argue that Adorno is correct, as well as stringently consequent, in maintaining that 'real' – if not already merely 'formal' – subsumption entails that the value-form has profoundly invaded (shaped or restructured) social mediation – including the supposedly 'intimate' *mise-en-scène* of the phantasy-theatres desire is obliged to negotiate.

Likewise in his assumption that this brings with it a deep change in the meanings and functions of the diverse aspects of sense-perception qua occasional musical material. It is not surprising that Adorno is of the opinion that, with respect to the desideratum or goal of breaking *this* tendentially closed, dead-ended and empty, false-but-effective quasi-autonomy – that of the invasion of music by the value-form – the Orphic strategy will not work.

5. *Use-value and intellectualist Givenness*

Let us state what we understand to be Adorno's own conclusion, and his ultimate reason for emphasising what he takes to be the non-sublimatory contemporary political bankruptcy of impulsive satisfaction in the immediacy of spatio-temporal sensorial-perceptual euphony. What we make out to be his guiding diagnostic principle is that commodity fetishism has caused us to start *desiring exchange-value itself*, and it just so happens (contingently) that the 'pleasure' of the partial moment henceforth, under this condition, lends itself as prey to a certain gross fetishistic snare which *blocks synthesis* (further specification of the nature of this snare will be given soon). Building this diagnosis and its explanation takes Adorno several steps, of which (again) three furnish the dialectical backbone.

i.) Firstly, where once pleasure-enjoyment, precisely because *meaningless* – i.e., contingent and *driven* – was able to execute an *anti-mythological* de-suture or unsticking of musical practice from the reactionary false principle of the magic circle (Bacchus against Aristotle), now pleasure has itself slid – along with a parodic spontaneity and a kitsch secularism – into the position of hypostatised organising principle:

> Impulse, subjectivity and profanation, the old adversaries of materialistic alienation, now succumb to it. In capitalist times, the traditional anti-mythological ferments of music conspire against freedom, as whose allies they were once proscribed. The representatives of the opposition to the authoritarian schema become witness to the authority of commercial success.[117]

The contingent fact of enjoyment's unfortunate tendency towards stubborn entrenchment in the *mollification* of the drive (rather than as its *sublimating* medium, which it is *not necessarily*, or not automatically) now presents itself as, on the one hand, fatally synergetic with capital's need

[117] FCM, 273. The 'authoritarian schema' is a shorthand for at least three interrelated instances: (a) the really socially effective phantasy-delusion of the auto-sufficient 'magic circle'; (b) actual *collective-social* conditions of injustice and unfreedom; and – more intrepidly –, (c) *socially estranged compulsion*.

to placate the producers into quietude[118], and fatally vulnerable, on the other, to operationalisation by the value-form's rerouting seizure of desire itself, a seizure which marketizes it. A default mode of desire being, of course, desire for the easiest pleasure – i.e., for the least costly and quickest cancellation of tension or binding of enjoyment-glue (depending on whether you're a Freudian or a Lacanian). Enslaved and pressed into the service of commercial profit, enjoyment qua pleasure loses its previously insubordinate, anti-snobbish character, and this – according to Adorno – in such a way that the synthetic construction of the artistic whole is occluded.

> The delight in the moment and the gay façade becomes an excuse for absolving the listener from the thought of the whole, whose claim is comprised in proper listening. The listener is converted, along his line of least resistance, into the acquiescent purchaser. No longer do the partial moments serve as a critique of that whole [i.e., of the 'authoritarian schema']; instead, they suspend the critique which the successful esthetic totality exerts against the flawed one of society. The unitary synthesis is sacrificed to them; they no longer produce their own in place of the reified one, but show themselves complaisant to it.[119]

Adorno has made it clear that, for him (and convincingly), open-ended cognitive sublimation is the *sine qua non* of whatever political thrust music might, in the abstract, possess – *because* it (sublimation) is an exercise of the unconditioned, transcendentally 'slippery' disloyalty and spontaneity of the causally underdetermined, and, *a priori* politically unsubjugated intellectual faculty, a faculty *lacking predetermined ends* in itself as in its drivenness by the acephalic repetition-compulsion, and yet capable – barring some kind of 'exterior' enslavement or other unforeseen malfunction – of *rejecting any imposed end* that would shut off the vector of

[118] Or rather, the *fait accompli* of capital's placation of (some) producers has perhaps never been anything other than its fortuitous harmony with enjoyment's inertia. Capital doesn't 'need' to do anything, because it is not an agent or an organism, and only agents or organisms can be said to 'need' anything. To properly bolster Adorno's point one would probably need to say something about *perversion* and *obsession*, because reason's incompleteness produces its own neuroses and it is not clear that *hysteria*, or anxiety in general and *simpliciter*, could be seen to play in favour of enjoyment's stuckness with regard to the fetish. In any case, our argument will be that incompleteness furnishes the condition of possibility of neurosis and *in the very same fell swoop* also the operator of irreconciliation with this neurosis, which operator – at least in principle, or speaking in the (contentless, or content awaiting) abstract – renders irrefrangibly possible the investigation of impersonal truth.

[119] FCM, 273. Our interposition.

discovery of new sonic construction-properties. This on-paper capacity to remain free – albeit only along the lines of Kant's 'empty freedom of the turnspit', which requires, before it can put itself to work, both an occasional material and an arbitrary heteronomous baptism-of-non-fire through the vapid violence of Lacan's 'Master's' gesture – is what makes the fact (alleged by Adorno) of the value-form's disabling invasion of the intellectual-synthetic faculty an *unpleasant surprise* and a *challenge* to the dialectician-theorist.

As reason itself cannot produce *ex nihilo* the first rule to which it binds itself in order to become able to (situatedly) set, revise and forge rules in general (that is, in order to be born as reason in the first place)[120], and as it cannot itself produce any spatio-temporal materials to investigate – with which to construct, and over which to decide-in-construction –, viewed in isolation its (reason's) spontaneity comes, paradoxically, to look like the stuttering glitch of a short-circuited mechanical gadget. As Rebecca Comay writes, looking askance at Kant such as to reveal reason's entanglement with the drive:

> Perpetually circling around itself, the mind starts to resemble the Cartesian body – a machine running on empty, its initiative stripped down to repetitive, automatic insistence, all agency reduced to the 'empty freedom of a turnspit.'[121]

The reference to the turnspit comes from Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, where he uses it to illustrate his claim that causal mechanisms alone cannot accede to 'transcendental freedom'[122] – that is, on Sellars' reading, not until they become capable of binding themselves to

---

[120] Terry Pinkard summarizes what he calls 'the Kantian paradox' (Pinkard, 'Sellars the Post-Kantian?', in ed. Wolf & Lance, *The Self-Correcting Enterprise: Essays on Wilfrid Sellars*, Amsterdam/NY: Rodopi, 2006, 21-52, 26; my interposition):

> a lawless will cannot obligate us, and a choice of practical principle made on the basis of *no* law would be simply arbitrary, so if the will were to give itself a law, it would need another law to choose that law; but if [as per Kant] only a self-legislated law was obligatory, that prior law could not itself be obligatory.

[121] Rebecca Comay, 'Hypochondria and Its Discontents, or, the Geriatric Sublime', *Crisis and Critique* Vol. 3 (2), Autumn 2016, 40-58.

[122] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, in Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. & trans. Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge: CUP, 1996 [1788], 217.

norms – even though they can be said to be possessed of a certain type of empty 'freedom to'. Once it has been wound up the turnspit is free to keep on spinning.[123] Our point here is that the mere fact of (the theoretical commitment to) mediation already introduces a heterogeneous meta-condition and alterity into the very possibility of subjectivity, opening the way to the theorization of the naturalization of rules (Sellars) and to the theorization of the heteronomous determination of reason's own relative autonomy, through Hegel's Lord-and-bondsman (or 'Master-Slave') dialectic, as read, if not by Alexandre Kojève, then certainly by Lacan, but equally as read by a post-Sellarsian such as Pinkard. But that reason's autonomy be relative, because heteronomously conditioned, does not entail that its 'empty spontaneity' could be anything other than *unconditional*.[124] If you lose spontaneity, you lose decision, and with it the distinction between sublimation and placation. Further, in general the attempt to refute (empty) spontaneity contradicts itself, because uttering a refutation presupposes being capable of binding yourself to the rules governing linguistic utterance, and spontaneity is itself nothing other than (or not much more than , or not exterior to) this very capacity to elucidate the consequences of revisable rules immediately downstream of which is (a) the capacity to revise rules by forging new ones, and (b) the decentred forcing of *decision* over contingently given undecidable options (the occasional

[123] Cf. *ibid.,* 218.

[124] As Danielle Macbeth writes, encapsulating a Kantian argument (Macbeth, *Realizing Reason*, Oxford: OUP, 2014, 197):

> The expressive freedom that is spontaneity, because it is constitutively self-activity, is inherently *self*-governed and *self*-correcting. There can be for spontaneity no given precisely because what is given is, as given, impervious to second thoughts. Indeed, that is why on Kant's account it is only as thought through concepts, as taken up and combined in the understanding, that the receptivity of sense is anything *for* us at all. But if that is right then we must further suppose that an act of productive freedom underlies and makes possible the expressive freedom of judgement.

And, '[e]ven the simplest awareness of anything involves an act of spontaneity according to rules' (*ibid*., 172). If this is accepted, then the question must be asked as to what *prevents* spontaneity from *producing new rules*, and in order to answer this question some account of its institution or genesis must be given. But our argument is that the question cannot be taken to extinguish the *unconditional* nature of spontaneity in its not-necessarily-productive 'emptiness'.

material) under makeable-explicit heteronomous (i.e., in-the-first-instance, habitual) conditions of ungrounded criterion-setting. Such is the Sellarsian-Kantian-Hegelian argument.[125]

The musical faculty's in-principle evasion of the imposition of alien ends is owed precisely to its anti-teleological (or, auto-telic) setting for itself of provisional-revisable ends (ends not tethered to any 'Ur-' or 'meta-' *telos* or *teloi*), *through the optic of* spontaneously schematised constructible-recomposable, but singular, plastic-normative totality-frames. Freedom conceived as a spurious noumenal force has been ruled out, and so spontaneity is only ever the spontaneity to construct and decide upon construction made out of the bric-a-bric of transcendental mediation itself, in its current historically contingent dispensation (the a priori having been historicized by the neo-Kantians, who ignored Hegel, who, some would argue, had destroyed it). Successful cobbled-together (construction always being piecemeal) aesthetic totalities (the perspective of totality, following Kant, never lacking as a transcendentally posable question) – after the models of Mozart or Alban Berg – *should*, one cannot but expect, be able to continue to furnish an open-ended shifting bestiary or experimental formal series for derisory comparison with, or gallows-laughter negation of, the dissatisfactory finite conditions of actual socio-political form. This, were it still possible, would continue to *demonstrate*, on at least some modest – necessary but not sufficient – level, the imperative to transform the world. It is therefore obvious that, *if* the shuttling between partial moment and schematised whole has been hijacked, stoppered, or hamstrung by a stirring-up of desire which leaves it foundering in a masturbatory reliance upon the partial stimuli of moments, lacking the strength to postpone the zeroing of tension or unstick and shift its own enjoyment-inertia, the consequences will indeed be dire (at least for music). However, as Adorno cannot, or by his own lights should not – on pain of inconsistency – call upon any unmediated knowledge of a metaphysical or simply given ululating 'exchange-value monster', qua substantial exterior force or cadaverous death's hand reaching in from the noumenon to impose this strangulating malfunction, we must get clear on precisely why and how he believes something along these lines to have indeed happened.

[125] Regarding empty spontaneity, qua viewed in isolation, not even – or, perhaps, especially not – François Laruelle would deny its operativity. Empty spontaneity's persistant glitchy stuttering (of which there is however no simple givenness, it being posited via deduction) is arguably coextensive with, or at least mappable onto, his 'determination in the last instance' or 'unilateralization': the indifferenciation of the realm of the determined in relation to that of indeterminacy insofar as each is *en bloc* knocked off the perch of auto-sufficiency with respect to the other through their equal distinguishment from an utterly inconsistent and untotalised zero-degree of immanence which, however, does not distinguish itself from them in return, and as such can only be effectuated by *doing something*.

ii.) The second step in his dialectic here is therefore to explicitly pinpoint *desire* – that is, the desire for x or y insofar as, in the last instance, it gains its errant hunger from the very same discontinuous spilt or lack as does the blind objectless insistence of the drive – as the point of leverage or traction by which *the value-form* can operationalize and marketize sensorial-perceptual pleasure-satisfaction. It is at this stage that Adorno presents his claim that, bluntly put, we have been forced by the commodity-form to desire exchange-value itself. A problem which at this moment threatens to rear its head and which must be clarified before getting into the nitty-gritty of this section of Adorno's essay is that desire must, *per se*, be seen as a side-effect of *the openness of mediation*: all the other options for what it may be or how it may work will lead Adorno to transgress his own stipulations by substantializing desire as a transparent given.

An exegetical detour is therefore needed before proceeding. We should here read the most rigorous gains of Jacques Lacan's critical 'return to Freud' back into Adorno – in order to produce the most charitable reading possible of the (aggregatively speaking) half of his essay which already presents a stringent appreciation of that Freudian principle according to which symbolic-cognitive *form* (speech and language, the knotty self-opaque entanglements of the ruses of the symptom and the resources of the phantasy, for which Lacan will use the shorthand of the 'effectivity of the letter', or simply of 'structure') breaks and unhinges the object-directedness of biological need, introducing a logic of its own (the slick gap of underdetermination again; how does one know about biology? Thanks to signifiers.) The status of the drive, as of desire, qua cutting across the boundary of merely psychological self-consciousness – and qua enabling the consciously grasped dilemmas of this self-consciousness while, in the very same theoretical gesture, splitting it open onto its own outside and making the false lure of a hidden *substantial* interior essence vanish in a puff of smoke – can only be derived from the *incompleteness* of the order of cognitive-symbolic form itself. There is no totalizing series of *all* cognitive series that would commensurate them under a metaphysically authoritative Ur-function. And yet the human animal has always-already been urgently stung by the epistemic question of totality, if only because this *real* incompleteness of structure, among other effects, leaves her in need of a map assembled from symbolic fragments: (a) in order to survive and negotiate the natural environment, given the opaque cut-off between natural instinct and linguistic self-consciousness and the evaporation of guiding natural ends which are the corollaries of speech and reflective cognition as such, insofar as these impose a new, naturally underdetermined and *purposeless* non-substantial compulsion upon the subject (if we are asking the question of what we should do, this itself demonstrates that nature cannot tell us what we should do, because question-asking inherently implies the non-natural *symbolic-formal* order of speech as its medium); and, (b) as the dialectical upshot of her inevitable *noticing* of the ungrounded (i.e., arbitrary and violent) institution of inherited socially dominant principles of mapping, such as this emerges in the struggle between Lord and bondsman, a 'noticing' coterminous with the rupture of Modernity to

which Adorno is faithful, here at least up to a point. Hence, insofar as the drive can be claimed by psychoanalysis to be, in the last instance, simply *real*, notwithstanding the pragmatic posits of its specific clinical or socio-political effects which we will have to wager here or there in order to understand what is going on in a given situation, it is real only as that ineliminable dissatisfaction of *reason itself*, qua the symbolic-cognitive order, *with itself* in its sharp separation, and constitutive alienation, from the (retroactively day-dreamed imago of) the natural realm of plenitude and completeness wherein problems would swiftly receive sufficient answers or would simply not arise at all.

The drive, then, is the persistence of the gap or crack in the cognitive order corresponding to the fact that it has no absolute enclosing limit (no metaphysically real Oneness), beyond the non-substantial limits it must contingently set for itself (establishing a semblance of Oneness or totality) as a response to the default of any necessary metaphysical cork that would fill in the hole into which signifiers listlessly, aimlessly extend, as if into the void. The symbolic-cognitive order cannot cork itself because each new cork is itself incomplete (has incompleteness as the condition of its intelligible unity) and requires another similarly incomplete cork to stopper it, and so on *ad infinitum*.[126] This is inhuman symbolic incompleteness qua condition of human desire.[127] Desire

[126] Whence, regarding this sliding, the aphorism 'a signifier is that which represents a subject for another signifier' (Lacan, Seminar XI, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, London/NY: Karnac, 2004, 207).

[127] For Lacan on the drive see Seminar XI, 161-200. Also relevant is Seminar XIX, in which the mathematical 'empty set' provides a model in the argument that the positive 'Oneness' of the count-as-one operative in the individuation of appearances is inseparable from the negative 'zero' from which it distinguishes itself by, in fact, repeating it (the zero). The repetition compulsion *might* on this basis be thought as repeating the impossibility of blotting out the non-One which is the determinant of all determination, including the determination of this attempted effacement, or as repeating the impossibility of disentangling what *is* only qua entangled in Oneness: that is, appearing. However, the danger here would be of eliding ontological and epistemic levels. Consistency may always come along with inconsistency, and unity with non-unity, but these are thought-determinations, not to be imported into the in-itself without caution. On our reading, what or who is compelled-to-repeat is the animal which has been seized by symbolic-cognitive mediation, and Lacan hypothesizes that the human being is this animal *par excellence* because for it 'there is no sexual relation': human instinct is in abeyance or default and in order to work out what to do the human is massively reliant upon the field of speech and caught up in problems proper to it. But this is not a matter that can be treated ontologically, or not at the price of sweeping aside *knowledge* and the dialectic of its self-relation. In light of Sellars' 'myth of Jones' in 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', nothing prevents the thesis that one can know things without knowing that one knows them. Thus the problem faced by the child confronting its own symbolic castration, ignorance, and desiring relation to

lacks an object that could have been destined for it by nature: it is the side of the drive that the human speaking animal is forced to struggle and work with, and launches itself upon a non-linear voyage from object to object without ever being satiated, constitutively circuited through the condition-loop of the self-relating negative incompleteness of *others' desires* and hence constitutively *social*, squeezed now through the defiles of the symptom, now scraping at and defacing the portentous weight of essentialising reaction as the restless will-to-know. As the correlate of what we are retroactively obliged, from our perspective, to postulate as the scission between natural plenitude (or *indifference*, for 'plenitude' may be a myth), and symbolic-formal discontinuity (i.e., *difference*), the drive is nothing other than the failure to close this gap and re-suture the cognitive order as a real totality: it (the drive) is ultimately driven only to reproduce itself as drive. '[I]ts aim is simply this return into circuit.'[128] While this 'mechanical' blind compulsion-to-repeat is carried over into the world of the human animal, furnishing the degree-zero of the libido and the compulsion of the animal's behaviour 'beyond the pleasure principle' (which suggests its nomination as the 'death drive'), Lacan's key proposition cannot be stressed enough, viz., that this very fact cannot, by definition, be disentangled from the drive's embroilment *sine qua non* in cognitive mediation. The drive is not biological (although Lacanians are not obliged to deny that it has, in the case of humans, biological conditions of effectivity[129]); it is rather a result of the splitting by which animality is opaquely, irreversibly alienated from itself by cognitive-symbolic difference. The drive is therefore nothing other than the bare – blank and underdetermined – fact of compulsion itself. Desire, on the other hand, is that lack which seeks fulfilment in an open-ended range of occurrent engagements, from the particular and the fleshly to the general and the abstract.[130] Without this conception of *desire* the idea of the

---

the 'Phallus' need not be explicitly theorised by the child as such in order to count as a problem of knowledge.

[128] Lacan, Seminar XI, 179.

[129] Lacan says that 'the drives are the echo in the body of a fact of saying [*les pulsions, c'est l'écho dans le corps du fait qu'il y a un dire*]' (Lacan, *The Sinthome. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XXIII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A. R. Price, Cambridge/Malden: Polity, 2016 [1975-1976]). On the question of biology see the second chapter, entitled 'Logic and Biology: Against Bio-logy', in Lorenzo Chiesa, *The Not-Two: Logic and God in Lacan*, Cambridge/London: MIT, 2016, especially that chapter's fourth subsection, 'Potential Energy versus the Lamella', and its fifth, 'Less than Less than Nothing: In-difference'.

[130] When Lacan rhetorically asks, 'If a bird were to paint would it not be by letting its feathers fall, a snake by casting off its scales, a tree by letting fall its leaves?' (Seminar XI, 114), is he not gesturing at an

sublimation – as opposed to the mere extirpation, cancellation, or quashing – of the drive (i.e., more precisely, of the tension of compulsion in Freud, which in Lacan becomes the stuttering opportunity to loosen enjoyment from its inertial stuckness), will fall into incoherence, because, without it, categorially different cashings-out of the drive – i.e. its voiding or quashing vs. its putting-to-work; its entrapment in the partial vs. its issuance in the questioning and construction of the whole – cannot be distinguished. Further, if the untethering of the drive from biological ends and the unmooring of desire into a non-predetermined errancy were not both assumed, Adorno's key stress on the unconditioned spontaneity of decision – 'Haydn's choice indeed' – would have the rug pulled out from under it. Decision is deprived of coherence as a meaningful concept if the dice is weighted by a quasi-natural (i.e., metaphysical or Leibnizian-religious) tendency, and Adorno would certainly balk at the role of God's lawyer[131].

While to arbitrarily criticise Adorno on the basis of Lacan would be uninteresting, amounting to a scholastic exercise in point-scoring, the making of these distinctions is, I claim, and as just hinted, necessitated by *Adorno's own* extremely acute grasping of the nettle of mediation, not to mention his vigilant suspicion regarding claims to 'immediacy', as per sketched by us at the outset of this chapter. Accordingly, my objective in the following pages will be to hold Adorno to his own standards by trying to bring out as sharply as possible those inconsistencies which I believe arise in his argument when he, in spite of himself, falls into, if not

---

entanglement of receptivity and spontaneity which attributes activeness to receptivity and compulsion to spontaneity? We are in favour of keeping open the question of the relation between, on the one hand, what one might call the 'stupid' or automatistic repetition pertaining to the 'material unconscious' – and thematized through 'toy models' such as the clicking of a cybernetic gate (for example, in Seminar II of 1954-1955) – and, on the other hand, what Žižek has recently called the 'Hegelian unconscious', the excess of *form* in the universal over the content which it renders transparent through that form. Our proposal – what we mean in speaking of the 'embroilment *sine qua non*' of desire and the drive in 'cognitive mediation' – is that, *if* spontaneity cannot be relinquished, then *nor* can some kind of self-relating universality – albeit arid or strangulated – such as that which Hegel calls *spirit*. This is not to dismiss the importance of the glitch of the material unconscious. It is, however, to argue that this glitch should not on its own be taken to block that other glitch which is that of the universal's empty spontaneity. Can the two glitches be clearly told apart? The argument we will go on to make in the following pages would press us to ask: Doesn't the possible blurring of the two glitches imply that *people are unable to stop thinking*? In Chapter 6 we will follow those wanting to put a Hegelian spin onto Lacan's use of the Moebius strip, a mathematical-topological figure among others (Klein bottle, cross cap, mitre, torus) deployed by him (in Seminar XIV of 1966-1967, for example) for the blurring of their insides with their outsides.

[131] Deleuze construes Leibniz as playing the role of God's attorney in *The Fold*.

– and perhaps, indeed, not – what Hegel calls the myth of sense-certainty, then what Wilfrid Sellars calls the Myth of the non-categorial Given, *in its insidious intellectual variant*.

If the derivation of the errancy of desire, and the purposelessness of the drive, from the incompleteness of the cognitive-symbolic order temporarily exonerates Adorno from the charge of biologizing or too-heavily mythologizing the drive, in fact it also lends further credence to his claim – which I find convincing – that we have been cornered in the trap of an enforced craving or longing for exchange-value itself. The crux of this claim – in a striking dialectical reversal – is that, inherent to the chimerical deception of commodity fetishism is a lure whereby a fake purity and *immediacy* of *jouissance* – an *absolute jouissance* which would once and for all snuff out the cloying persistence of dissatisfaction – can be and is ('mendaciously') promised by nothing other than that overweening social *mediation* that is *money* – or, the value-form – itself. Exchange-value flaunts itself, paradoxically, as nothing other than the mirage of *immediate use-value*; nothing else is capable of generating such a phastasmagorical sheen, and this is why we are drawn to desire it – the value-form – as nothing else.

> This is the real secret of success. It is the mere reflection of what one pays in the market for the product. The consumer is really worshipping the money that he himself has paid for the ticket to the Toscanini concert. He has literally 'made' the success which he reifies and accepts as an objective criterion, without recognizing himself in it. But he has not 'made' it by liking the concert, but rather by buying the ticket. To be sure, exchange-value exerts its power in a special way in the realm of cultural goods. For in the world of commodities this realm appears to be exempted from the power of exchange, to be in an immediate relationship with the goods, and it is this appearance in turn which alone gives cultural goods their exchange-value. But they nevertheless simultaneously fall completely into the world of commodities, are produced for the market, and are aimed at the market. The appearance of immediacy is as strong as the compulsion of exchange-value is inexorable.[132]

How does immediacy appear as immediacy in the first place? How does immediacy become intelligible as such? As we will later glimpse, the historical materialism of Marx and Engels makes it clear that this is far from an idle question, since it maintains that everything that *is*, including current intelligibilities, has *become*. On our reading, Adorno's proposal here is that

[132] FCM, 279.

immediacy qua immediacy, in its guise as lure, in a first step appears– on the level of unconscious phantasy – *in contrast to* mediation's dead-ended mission of sublimation. Hence, in a second step – and again on the level of unconscious phantasy –, it appears as an 'easy exit' from the task of trying to continue that mission. We are led to desire and venerate *the mediation that is exchange-value* as if it was itself *an unmediated use-value*.[133]

Such are the conditions required to render maximally clear Adorno's claim – the finality and hermetic sealing of which we will soon question – that desire has slipped *inexorably and exclusively* into the gravitational field of the falsely commensurating, sterile scale of the value-form itself, there to be nailed to its cross in such a way as to suggest that the only way out will be the burning of the cross itself and the razing of the hill upon which it stands. The gothic imagery is by way of conjuring what we take to be the misguidedly doom-laden (i.e., peremptorily secessionist) side of Adorno's stance. For now, however, it is important to grasp the acuity of Adorno's *derivation* (closely following Marx himself) of the leering and obscene, hideously seductive lie of a pure and unmediated use-value *as* a contingently generated – albeit transcendentally inevitable – subjectively *erroneous* phantasy-semblance. It seems to us that the argument is that the circumstantial conditions for an unconscious-unwitting *substantialization* of the value-form have become simply too tendentially strong for the phantasy to withstand them. It cannot dodge the trap of mistaking value's glimmer for an easy exit precisely from reification. The phantasy itself is, after all, tendentially frail and weak insofar as, *faute de* some non-trivial prodding by the faculty of reason-decision, the glue of enjoyment will tend to conservatively and repetitively return to the 'scene' of its most recent 'crime'. This easy exit would flaunt itself, on the unconscious but socially-effective level, as promising to burst through the opacity and undecidability (that which forces the effort of decision) left by the lost natural object of enjoyment, so as to let the subject seamlessly fuse – endowed with the trappings of illusory self-propulsion and omnipotence deriving from the Capital-monster-fetish – with the universe itself counted as a One. Add to this the supplementary snare (fuelled, we may hypothesize, by the legacy of the Jena Romantics) of 'cultural goods' supposed to be a site free from mediation, and thereby assumed to be 'exempted from the power of exchange value' – which assumption precisely attains for them a steep price-tag – and we can see that for Adorno – to reiterate – the problem is that mediation has itself given birth to the lie that unmediatedness is to be gained by plying the specific social mediation that is the value-form. Thus has been sketched the tendentially

[133] That is, because the theatrical *mise-en-scene* upon which the concept-monger is forced to rely is the only arena wherein might be wrought a guess or story regarding where to look for the leveraging of *more agency*, for a clue as to where the access to freedom and autonomy may be sought, such that the conundrum of desire not get stuck upon the bad repetition of mere subservience to the empty drive.

– but tendentially *only under certain libidinal conditions* – tightening noose of a positive feedback loop helping capital-concentration to – *libidinally-phantasmagorically* – consolidate its grip as dominant social principle has been sketched.

However, to maintain that transcendental mediation is an irrefrangible enabling necessity for any experience and any cognition at all is *not* to maintain that the construction and the decision proper to musical practice need hesitantly pass by some kind of second-order calculus by which they would have to second-guess their own methodological wherewithal. Such a mistaken conclusion leads to (what we view as) the stalled, supercilious cop-out of the postmodern-eclectic 'mixing and matching' of cherry-picked idioms from the catalogue of 'World Music', or, alternatively, to the false dawn (or false dusk) implied by deciding that the *only* solution is to abandon decision entirely, in favour of stumbled-upon inputs and stochastic phasing *à la* John Cage, Phillip Glass and Steve Reich. I propose that this dilemma is a *recherché* blackmail. As is tacit but in fact clear in the best passages of Adorno's essay, acknowledging Kantian mediation precisely discounts the coherence of positing any overhanging synoptic level from which a pseudo-metaphysical overview could predictively pre-empt, count, or close a 'set' of all possible tendentially non-idiomatic(-within-idiomaticity) musical auto-openings through auto-negation. Brassier, Guionnet, Mattin & Murayama use Laruelle creatively-reconstructively in order to make this point:

> [M]usic is never completely idiomatic: non-idiomatic playing is playing that does not seek to represent what one thinks music should be or how music should work. In this regard idiom itself is radically a-subjective. It becomes subjective when it becomes the representation of a particular idiom: this is music as idiocy... It's a question of inserting the idiocy of the real into human being: you don't choose to have the accent you have but you can work with or against it.

And, in more technical terms, which we believe highlight what Laruelle, in spite of himself, shares with Hegel:

> Instead of exacerbating reflexivity by ascending to a meta-metalevel, non-philosophy adds a third layer of auto-reflexivity that is also a minus (a + that is a -) – a subtraction that allows us to view all philosophy [and likewise all calcified idioms] from a vantage point that is at once singular and universal. Mediating abstraction is concretized and unified through a practice that, as Laruelle puts it, allows it to be 'seen-in-One'. This is not some mystical rapture but a practical immersion in

> abstraction; a concretization of theory that precludes the sort of play 'with' different philosophical idioms indulged in by postmodern ironists.[134]

In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as with the neo-Kantians, transcendental form is seen to be in an open-ended and mutable state, temporally frayed and plastically augmentable, such that no metaphysical bound freezes the specific placement of its finite edge. The corollary of this is that musical construction is a creature *entirely* of decision and the discoveries it makes: by Adorno's own lights – as sketched at the outset of this chapter – the faculty of construction *in principle* and on a meta-generic level (concerning the most skeletal outlines of what music, as opposed to non-music, is) remains possessed of the full 'empty' spontaneity of the turnspit, because in music, which is an experimental cognitive practice, there is no shortfall or lag between deciding and acting, nor between constructing and discovering. Thus Adorno's position is that, if it weren't for the calamity that he believes has befallen musical function (the advent of which calamity was possible only because desire is an errant free-floating motor of transcendental construction, external to it only qua springing up from the incompleteness and heteronomy of its own materials), then the ramification, gluing, and so on, of musical form *would* be *perfectly* 'immediate' – in the sense of: not second-guessable; not benefitting from any hesitation that would try in vain to unearth a guiding Ur-principle, and it *would* therefore always full-bloodedly risk the failure of banality just as much as the success of sublimation – and this *because of, and thanks to, its very mediacy* (the fact that it is mediated). Indeed, as we have established, decision is meaningful only insofar as it is forced, and acknowledging mediation implies that the Kantian thing-in-itself becomes an underdetermining, untotalizing, de-corking, and otherwise 'unhelpful' blindspot. This is simply by way of spelling out the necessary nuance that the 'bad' phantasmagorical im-mediacy which Adorno views as adhering to 'cultural goods' in the fetish-error is not the 'immediacy' of the relative autonomy of spontaneous construction and forced decision enabled by the fact of mediation. These are simply two separate meanings of the word 'immediate'. Bad im-mediacy is the mirage of fusing with, or being penetrated or assimilated by, a mythical use-value-force which would be im-mediate (as in 'unmediated'), in that it would be taken to self-sufficiently beam its properties into the perceiving faculty of the consumer along the lines of a pre-Kantian 'intellectual intuition'. Good immediacy can be summed up in shorthand by pointing out that when guitar strings are being plucked, or when a quasi-geometrical rhythm-series is being composed, or when the nooks and crannies of a digital synthesizer are being clumsily tested out, there is no distance whatsoever between constructor and construction,

[134] Brassier, Guionnet, Mattin & Maurayama, 'Idioms and Idiots', 2010, https://www.jeanlucguionnet.eu/IMG/pdf/IDIOMS_AND_IDIOTS.pdf. Paragraphs 7 and 5 respectively.

because the sonic forms produced have no being separate from the intertwinedly subjective-objective transcendental procedures which have produced them.[135] Or rather, their non-musical, imperceptible being-in-themselves – for the Sellarsian – belongs to the causal order and so is musically relevant in-the-first-instance only as physical enabling condition… Intellectually grasping what a musician is doing may for an auditor require learning or re-forging the rules of their construction, but, according to Sellars, nothing more demanding than this, because, on his reading of Kant, concepts – including those which schematise space and time – are nothing but arrangements of rules; this is a de-mystification of artistic context. Speaking in the abstract, any musical idiom remains dialectically constructible. To anticipate the main strut of our conclusion, in 1938 Adorno's precipitate wholesale opting-out of capitalist society as entirely barren and deadlocked is tied up with his forgetting of, and riding roughshod over, this entailment of his own Kantian-Hegelianism or Hegelian-Kantianism.

To recapitulate then, it is nothing other than the potency of commensuration wielded by exchange-value itself – the very fact that this real-abstract scale-mediation's empty-skulled, ansubjective idiocy has been able to stymy other social functions and to subjugate them to the end of the concentration and reinvestment of Capital, that determines the sheen of untrammelled im-mediacy that comes to hypnotise us in the 'cultural' commodity. Indeed, Capital never decided to be Capital. It can only appear – once fetishistically mistaken for an Ur-subject – as as happily oblivious to the responsibilities and uncertainty of *decision* as it is to the nagging want of a forever-already-lost total satisfaction which desire hallucinates.

> The appearance of immediacy takes possession of the mediated, exchange-value itself. If the commodity in general combines exchange-value and use-value, then the pure use-value, whose illusion the cultural goods must preserve in completely capitalist society, must be replaced by pure exchange-value, which precisely in its capacity as exchange-value deceptively takes over the function of use-value. The specific fetish

[135] We take it that the punch packed by Deleuze and Guattari's polemic in *Anti-Oedipus* comes from a point close to this one. Reading them against their own grain, the Beckettian character producing assemblage-happenstances by shuffling the pebbles in his pocket can be seen to be engaged in activities wherein hesitation is irrelevant – i.e., possible but unhelpful – and for which no second-order calculus could possibly yield any criteria any more promising than those which may be yielded in the brusque rupture implied in *deciding* to do something on the basis of criteria one has *decided* to set for oneself either for a particular reason or for the reason that that there is no particular reason for doing it. Deleuze and Guattari appear to be fed up with the absolutization of hesitancy cropping up in certain neighbourhoods of post-Heideggerian philosophy. However, they derive ruptural abruptness through a positive 'metaphysics of production', whereas the post-Hegelian will seek to obtain it through *negativity*.

> character of music lies in this *quid pro quo*. The feelings which go to the exchange value create the appearance of immediacy at the same time as the absence of a relation to the object belies it. It has its basis in the abstract character of exchange-value. Every 'psychological' aspect, every *ersatz* satisfaction, depends on such social substitution.[136]

Exchange-value replaces the monotheistic God as the entity capable of embodying the lie of a self-sufficient completeness and Oneness – and it does so *a fortiori* through luxury goods such as Toscanini tickets. Simply forking out the money for the tickets being felt as already in itself a short-circuit to the longed-for prestige (the unconscious – in Freud's account impervious to the principle of non-contradiction – automatically hedging its bets by remaining also, on top of the metaphysico-theological niceties for which it has fallen, mired at an early stage of the dialectic of Lord and bondsman by requiring that others also *see the buyer* at the concert), the buyer presumes himself to have acceded to (the semblance of) completeness, and the actual musical work of the Maestro recedes into irrelevance. This irrelevance is the transaction's 'absence of a relation to the object'. Perhaps some base drives may be placated by partial moments of the performance – received as vulgar adrenalin-rush-inducing macho flourishes – but as the value-form is unconsciously taken by the attendee to be the subject (of an already achieved plenitude), and himself and the Maestro and orchestra taken as objects – perhaps holed by a lack which the value-form has now corked – what really remains to be done? This magic circle has, for Adorno, been closed –and the narcissistic mollification thereby gained is an *ersatz* – i.e., non-sublimatory – satisfaction. The carrot that spurs the positive feedback loop which solidifies the value-form's structural-phantasmagorical dominance[137] is the *transcendentally inevitable error* of the lust for what exchange-value *falsely* promises. And the dissociative glue of value-enjoyment plays a role in holding society disjunctively together, it having become clear that Adorno, at his most

[136] FCM, 279.

[137] Phantasmagorical-symptomal effectivity is *not* being claimed by us to be the only kind of structural dominance enjoyed by the value-form. It is arguable that Adorno's sophistication slides somewhat in the direction of vulgarity in 1938 by neglecting to separate the *prima facie* opacity of the psychoanalytic symptom from the *prima facie* opacity of actual social practice. The socio-practical conditions bearing upon cognition and production are not *only* a matter of the phantasy and the symptom, although the argument here is that it is credible that there is a phantasy-structure specific to the commodity-fetish, without the 'traversal' of which (in Lacanian terminology) one debilitating stop on the capacities of decision and production in all areas will not have been lifted.

coherent, concurs with Lacan that enjoyment is something apart, in its wayward paradoxicality, from what is suggested of simplicity and immediacy (in either sense) in the word 'pleasure':

> The appearance of exchange-value in commodities has taken on a specific cohesive function. The woman who has money with which to buy is intoxicated by the act of buying. In American conventional speech, having a good time means being present at the enjoyment of others, which in turn has as its only content being present. The auto religion makes all men brothers in the sacramental moment with the words: 'That is a Rolls Royce'[138]

That Adorno presents this state of affairs as exceptionlessly terminal vis-à-vis the possibility of free action, rather than as tendential and as itself enabled by the very conditions which enable empty freedom, is what will need to be criticized. But it would be imprudent of us – given the suspicion towards the claim for the *substantial im-mediacy of pleasure* which Adorno convincingly (if ultimately inconsistently[139]) recommends – to deny that, at the very least, he has produced a stringent demonstration that one cannot assume that what *feels good* always *is* good.

iii.) So far so good, more or less, but how far does the pertinence of the fact that one cannot assume that pleasure is always good really extend? Where the essay in my view swerves into inconsistency is in the third step of its core dialectic, where Adorno proffers the claim that people are henceforth *quintessentially and absolutely incapable* of achieving any sort of sublimation through music. The assumption which backs up this claim is that exchange-value has, in some sense, started to *destroy* use-value. This is entirely explicit: 'The more inexorably the principle of exchange-value *destroys* use-values for human beings, the more deeply does exchange-value disguise itself as the object of enjoyment.'[140] And more allusively, but I believe

---

[138] FCM, 279.

[139] As we will argue, *jouissance* viewed as 'pleasure' threatens to fly in the face of Adorno's own most decisive conclusions in FCM by solidifying into something *from which one could be estranged*. Our argument will entail that *jouissance* qua pain-in-pleasure or pleasure-in-pain is a property of *compulsion*. Further, it is in its root non-psychologizable, because it is fundamentally *practical-functional* (in a dialectically ramified sense), and is concomitant with alienation itself, conceived not pejoratively but along the Hegelian-Marxian vectors, to be reviewed later in Chapter 8, of *externalization – Entaüsserung* – and the inevitable *estrangement* of this – *Entfremdung*. *Jouissance is* estrangement, and so cannot itself be estranged.

[140] FCM, 279. Our italics.

quite clearly: 'What makes its appearance, like an idol, out of such masses of type' – that is, out of the homogenised fetish-functions across different spheres of music, 'high' and 'low' – 'is the exchange-value in which the quantum of possible enjoyment has disappeared.'[141] *Prima facie* this begs two questions. What type of thing would use-value have to be in order to be able to be 'destroyed' by exchange-value? And what type of thing would exchange-value have to be in order to be able to 'destroy' use-value?

Neither instance is in fact a 'thing' at all. Both are *concepts*, elaborated within a theory, which distinguish two classes of function: exchange-value classifies the function of commensuration through the 'universal equivalent', money, where money is the measure of abstract labour time; and use-value is a capaciously general and necessarily vaguely defined class of functions (a meta-class) collecting instances categorised as enablers of or materials for activities which humans may need to accomplish or benefit from accomplishing. We have seen that Adorno's project is one of *desubstantialization*: of sensible perception, the form and import of which are not simply – but rather, dialectically – given; of musical strategy and form, which must be decided upon and actively constructed, again in a dialectic with social, political, and other factors; and of the value-form qua apparently self-propelling cosmic principle and hallucinated unmediated cork of the fissure of incompletion separating the cognitive-symbolic order from nature, which lure – it cannot be stressed enough – is an *erroneous* conception. The problem is that, in now construing the commodity-fetish as an operator through which exchange-value 'destroys' use-value, Adorno cannot help tacitly *re-substantializing* one or both instances, thereby transgressing his own Kantian-Hegelian stipulations regarding the irreducible necessity of mediation for thought and experience. Following those stipulations – which allow Adorno to successfully avoid the empiricist variant of Sellars' Myth of the Given, and some pitfalls of the intellectualist version – the concept of the functional class 'use-value' must be sheerly separated from the possibility of unveiling itself in perceptual (or 'intellectual') intuition or through any other type of im-mediate awareness.

Under the generalization of the fetish, presumably it would be 'useful' to in some way negate, slough off, or surpass or bypass this fetish. Are we to suppose that in pre-capitalist periods sublimation was somehow effortlessly 'easy' to achieve? No, and now during the capitalist period my own experience of doing something could *never* by itself allow me to *feel* that what I am doing

[141] FCM, 278. Adorno's essay is often referred to by way of citing – in an out-of-context fashion and in order to accuse him of being a curmudgeon, elitist, or puritan – his suspicion that dance enthusiasts (the *soi-disant* 'jitterbugs') are placating rather than sublimating the drive, due to the value-reification of their activity. But the scorn he pours onto institutionalised 'classical' music in the essay, and the serious cogency of its Freudian-dialectical analysis of the commodity-fetish should serve to put into question the good faith of this accusation. What needs to be criticised are the presuppositions leading to the essay's secessionism.

is successfully challenging the grip of the commodity-fetish upon sublimation. That criterion must be wrested from cognitive mediation – from the defiles of which there is no short-cut exit – through reason's experimental setting of revisable aims and failure-prone strategic hypotheses. Further, as we have abandoned the Aristotelian idea that nature could direct us apropos of what we *should do*, it has to be acknowledged that 'use-value' in isolation becomes so general a category as to be, empirically, *entirely* vacuous, offering no traction whatsoever to any attempt to identify certain practices, as opposed to others, as supposedly fitting its archetype or directional thrust, because it isn't one and doesn't have any. It is a theoretical function posited by Marx in order to try to explain how capital-accumulation, through exchange-value, was able to become the dominating dissolutive and reshaping social principle, and to give the grounds for arguing that this state of affairs can and should be overcome. Use-value only appears as an issue and an askable question from the vantage of the already-achieved effectivity of exchange-value, being retroactively conceptualised as one of its very enabling conditions[142]: it is *not* an empirical property one could ever 'bump into' or 'encounter' in the world. Therefore, for a start, the idea that exchange-value could be said, even metaphorically, to *annihilate* use-value is questionable, first of all because 'use-value' is primarily a theoretical-navigational abstraction, and as such has clearly not been annihilated. All glibness aside, even if the commodity-fetish was the terminally monopolizing desire-trap which Adorno in the essay suggests it might be (and we do not accept this possibility, because we conceive of desire, enjoyment, and pleasure as distinct, along the very Lacanian lines which are arguably already demanded by Adorno's essay's strongest moments), this would still not allow for claiming that exchange-value had been 'destroyed' by use-value, because, according to Adorno's argument, desire itself must remain, so to speak, a 'non-produced use-value', in order that the value-form (qua operator of capital-concentration) retain its effectivity, because this effectivity is conditional upon remaining the strangulating – but *not* absolutely or terminally strangulating – parasite *of desire*. Desire is not exactly the same thing as the value-form, and could never become so, not least because it has to be able to lack what the value-form promises if the value-form is to continue to have anything to organise and constrain – that is, anything that could or should be organised and constrained differently. And, on the Lacanian account, it is entirely possible for one desire to work against other desires, because

[142] This is a methodological meta-principle which is shared by 'value theorists', such as Moishe Postone and the Endnotes collective, critics of the 'labour theory of value' such as Michael Heinrich, and Lacanian readers of Marx such as Samo Tomšič. See, *inter alios*, Endnotes, *Endnotes 2: Misery and the Value-Form*, April 2010, and Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan*, London/NY: Verso, 2015. In passing, we should note that Adorno, in work around from around 1960, will be among the progenitors of the 'value theory' which we here will mobilise in order to criticise his 1938 stance.

desire lacks a proper object, is not tethered to pleasure, and is (or in principle might be – if the florid language be forgiven) a non-monothetic self-contradictory hydra which may desire to contradict desire. Any attempt to *in toto* get rid of use-value as that from which, in-the-last-instance, the value-form 'leeches', even as it reshapes it, will, as far as we can make out, always have to hypostatise capital itself into a substantially autonomous – that is, genuinely *self*-generating and *self*-propelling – closed monster-system unto itself. If exchange-value is taken to be anything other than a peculiar arrangement of use-values having become involutedly estranged from themselves – or, better, a peculiar arrangement of abstract practical functions – it can only be construed as metaphysically *sui generis*, and this is incoherent.

However, that the motivating pressure or hunger or compulsion of desire be missing or misplaced or misdirected is not the only blockage to sublimation-construction cited by Adorno, i.e., not the only blockage evoked against – to reiterate what musical sublimation involves per se – the weaving of musical wholes from parts such that the properties of the parts (for example, the colouristic dimension; rhythmic variability) can be investigated and ramified from the vantage of the provisional guiding commitments accrued in the optic of the whole-schema, and such that be produced a plastic totality of the type capable of displaying various kinds of incommensurability[143] with (the schematic understanding of the questions of) actual socio-political form and actual non-musical or extra-musical or quasi-musical collective creative capacities.

Indeed, exchange-value is deployed in the essay a second time, no longer as desire-trap – an argument ultimately not chronically enclosing enough to make the impossibility of sublimation stick – but now as a *screen* somehow preventing listeners from grasping – i.e., cognizing – the specific qualities of the musical work. Either a screen, or some kind of 'spanner thrown into the works' of mereological construction, cutting off, tripping up, or generally rendering inoperative the faculties' enactment, following, actualisation or iteration of the

[143] The question of the twists and turns of this incommensurability is wide open. In the 1950s or '60s Adorno writes, offering some welcome Hegelian reversals whereby content 'tumbles' into form and form 'flips over' again into content: 'What is essential to art is that which in it is not the case, that which is incommensurable with the empirical measure of all things', and

> Art's asociality is the determinate negation of a determinate society [...] A pure productive force such as that of the aesthetic, once freed from heteronomous control, is objectively the counterimage of enchained forces, but it is also the paradigm of fateful, self-interested doings. Art keeps itself alive through its social force of resistance; unless it reifies itself, it becomes a commodity [...] Whenever art seems to copy society, it becomes all the more an 'as if'. (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. & trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, London/NY: Continuum, 1997 [1970], 335, 226.)

intellectual synthesis at hand. Adorno quite rightly underlines that '[t]he concept of musical fetishism cannot be psychologically derived', belonging as it does at root to the *transcendentally* conditioning socio-economic stratum.[144] But he then goes on:

> That 'values' are consumed and draw feelings to themselves, without their specific qualities being reached by the consciousness of the consumer, is a later expression of their commodity character. For all contemporary musical life is dominated by the commodity form; the last pre-capitalist residues have been eliminated.[145]

---

[144] The commodity-fetish can indeed be classed among those effective symbolic complexes – such as Freud's Oedipus-complex or Lacan's 'formulas of sexuation' – without some minimal knotting of which the stratum of sociality could not be allotted the reorganizability and separation from the indifferent closure of bio-homeostatic passivity needed to render intelligible the transition from feudalism to capitalism (among many other things). This would be supported by Marx's shorthand for the value-form, qua obliquely apparent-theorizable side-effect and *inapparent enabler* of exchange, as a 'hieroglyphic' (Marx, *Capital*, excerpted in ed. David McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Oxford: OUP, 2000, 452-546, 475; my italics):

> when we bring the products of our labour into relation with each other as values, it is not because we see in these articles the material receptables of homogenous human labour. Quite the contrary: whenever, by an exchange, we equate as values our different products, by that very act, we also equate, as human labour, the different kinds of labour expended upon them. *We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it*. Value, therefore, does not stalk about with a label describing what it is. It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, we try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret of our own social products; for to stamp an object of utility as a value, is just as much a social product as language.

And – while we're at it – this, which would seem also to cut off *practice* from the unfolding of organic instinct (*ibid.*, 493):

> A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality.

[145] FCM, 278.

Problematically, it would seem here that among the pre-capitalist residues to have been eliminated from music is, in fact, the music itself. If its 'specific qualities' cannot even be 'reached', not only *not* being synthetically constructed-enacted-followed-actualised-iterated, but also *not even being perceived*, then we would appear to have lost even the isolated moment-crumbs, with scant leftovers remaining. Adorno writes that when the moments of qualitatively variegated sense-perception (which presumably here for him are now merely potential, de-actualised – it's hard to say) have been

> made into fetishes and torn away from any functions which could give them their meaning, they meet a response equally isolated, equally far from the meaning of the whole, and equally determined by success in the blind and irrational emotions which form the relationship to music into which those with no relationship enter.[146]

Thus he says of the consumers of 'hit songs' that

> [t]heir only relation is to the completely alien, and the alien, as if cut off from the consciousness of the masses *by a dense screen*, is what seeks to speak for the silent. Where they react at all, it no longer makes any difference whether it is to Beethoven's Seventh Symphony or to a bikini.[147]

So, there is a screen shutting us off from what use-value there is to be had in the resources offered by music, be they mereological-dialectical tools, or quite simply *audible* occurents: sounds. Or, by way of alternative imagery, there is a dead-weight pressing down upon, or a dagger hamstringing, or a spanner in the works of the basic apparatus of *hearing* – which we have established has to be a synthetic-schematic transcendental-operational organised-shape-bestowing apparatus, along Kantian lines. Thus, while this screen-blockage getting in the way of basic *listening* looks at first glance very much like a metaphor for the psychological stupefaction entailed by the generalized robbery of agency from producers – a story which we would at the best of times have good reason to view as facile – as far as can be made out Adorno is in fact deadly serious, in this passage, about claiming that musical use-value has been *literally* destroyed

[146] FCM, 278.

[147] FCM, 278. Our italics. In passing, and in anticipation, the 'alien' which 'seeks to speak for the silent' seems to be an admiring nod to Schoenberg's strategy of trying to stubbornly voice withdrawn refusal itself.

or, at least, for the time being rendered, *literally* unexceptionlessly null. If so, we are faced with a real – and really problematic – inconsistency.

Exchange-value is said to be *blocking* the transcendental faculty of mereological schematisation, the stalling of which hobbles sublimation. Let us recall that *neither* desire, *as* what we have called an *'unproduced use-value'* – that is, desire in the guise of the errant motivator of action which is non-naturally-predetermined and non-causally-overdetermined: the zero-degree, condition, or *sine qua non* of use –, *nor* sublimation – in the guise of, at one and the same time, the vector of insubordinate discovery and the breaker of the magic circles of neurotic-syptom-tyranny, political lethargy, and faux-metaphysical ideological closure –, *neither* can claim any *unmediated substantiality*. Adorno has been at great pains to conceptualise them as functional effects or modalities *of the drive's very entanglement in mediation*. But this means, as noted at the outset, that *nothing* can constrain the a priori 'empty spontaneity' of the intellectual faculties, which themselves can only be assemblages constituted by nothing other than arrangements of *mediating functions*. *Not even* the finite scope of sonic sense-perceptible 'matter' – to which, regarding pitch-frequency and so on, sonic construction is limited by the biological specificity and inextensible (or, only partially extensible) material frailty of the eardrum and the nervous system – can alone *stop* the forward-movement of sublimation qua construction-decision. Why not? Because, firstly, the part-whole relation, qua formal-transcendental, is per se indefinitely ramifiable. And, secondly and more non-trivially, it is Kantian *reason* – the queen of the faculties, if you will – which is implicitly the ultimate disloyal decider here, responsible as builder and assessor of wholes and meta-wholes which themselves work with an open-ended, shifting set of *socio-political meanings or problems* over which reason roams. *Without* reason's untethered power to decide to set for itself *any* goal of which it is able to conceive using the resources it fortuitously has at hand – including deciding to do a conceivable thing for *no reason*, or for a more or less arbitrary reason – the separation of the *necessity* of the drive from the contingency of the *possible but not inevitable* constructions and discoveries in which it may be sublimated collapses, because a 'little bit' of decision already implies the full quotient of a 'lot of' – indeed, an *absolutely* – ungrounded last-instance arbitrariness separating decision from metaphysical necessity. This is the Sellarsian-Kantian distinction between reasons (or norms) and causes. As per Kant, reason is the faculty that lets me ('me' meaning, the decentred opaque effectivity of the Lacanian-Cartesian 'I think', and of the – possibly unconscious or preconscious – Sellarsian decider-person, neither of these being distinguishable from functions of reason itself) – that lets me *know* what the other faculties are doing, and lets me decide to deploy them in varying ways towards varying ends – ways and ends *not* dictated by natural causality.[148] Furthermore, none of

[148] The synthetic unity of apperception, the anchor of reason, is for Kant required to harvest the productions of the 'lower' faculties, to adjudicate in conflicts between them, and to assimilate their outputs within the

the ‘lower’ faculties can give one an idea of what politics *is*; only reason can string together the narrative and conflictual-materialist meaning of this term, and only the (*prima facie* empty) spontaneous errancy of reason can enable Adorno’s essay’s key claim that music is always dialectically entwined in a relation to politics and to the historically contingent de facto shape of collectivity.

If nothing is unmediated, then clearly neither our knowledge of our own practical participation in use-values, nor our knowledge of our own practical participation in exchange-value, is unmediated. The spartan vacuousness of the negative noumenon, further, means that what the theoretical terms ‘use-value’ and ‘exchange-value’ *mean* can be coherently adjudicated only by reason, *if and when* reason decides to set itself the goal of producing an explanatorily powerful theory about them.

Adorno’s mission is one of desubstantialization. By suggesting in 1938 that exchange-value could choke the functioning of the apparatuses of dialectical synthesis, does he not, therefore, contradict himself? In order for exchange-value to block these functions, it has to be surreptitiously expulsed from the transcendental-intelligible-pragmatic register of mapped ‘happenings’ (functions), out into an exteriority which can only be a faux-Aristotelian outside populated by substantial essences. This expulsion cannot but involve a pre-critical reification of the thing-in-itself. It is only from such a metaphysically swollen exterior that the value-form could reach its tentacle back into transcendental functionality to jam synthesis and erect a screen fencing off cognition from accessing the goodies required for musical sublimation. Quite clearly, this swag has, at this peculiarly botched moment of the dialectic, itself been substantialized: use-values are not the type of ‘thing’ which could be hidden from us behind the obstruction of a screen at which we would scrabble and which we would eventually need to tear down. This is the wrong metaphor, because, as we have seen, the occasional material of musical sublimation is *nothing other than the transcendental material of mediation itself*. Any ‘screen’ can only be a transcendental-synthetic screen, itself a product of synthetic operativity and therefore not capable on its own of effectuating the stoppage of this operativity. The fact of the matter is that, if Adorno wants to construe sublimation as *completely* (albeit temporarily) impossible, he can only do this by relying tacitly upon a resubstantialized foundational level. If use-value is construed as the type of thing which can be said to be ‘blocked behind a screen’, then it, along with labour-power, has been illegitimately substantialized as a natural given. Sublimatory production is production which open-endedly explores the world in the absence of metaphysically given *teloi*. Thus labour-power, the capacity to produce, does not beam any predetermined criteria for its own success into the intellect from the noumenon. The casting of exchange-value in the role of the ‘screen’ can

plastic and fissurable-revisable horizon of totality without which the idea of ‘knowledge’ loses its intelligibility. This is itself a non-substantial model.

therefore only make sense on the basis of a substantialization of use-value and labour-power. If we get rid of the screen metaphor and try to say that it is the *reificatory* effects of the value-form which pose challenges to sublimation, we will be entirely correct – but we will still *not* be able to argue that sublimation has been *completely* stopped and frozen *in principle*. At least, not without hypostatizing capital itself into the self-caused ice-monster mentioned above – that is, not without allotting to exchange-value the role of autonomous and transparently intellected foundational Aristotelian – or indeed Spinozist – substantial Uber-agent.

Either one of these substantializations falls foul of Sellars's neo-Hegelian attack on the intellectualist variant of the Myth of the non-categorial Given, which Myth would, in this case, be found to have smuggled in three sets of presuppositions:

(a.) that the functional structure of our own thoughts is im-mediately and unproblematically available to our own scrutiny (Kantian dualism having been rejected between Hegel and Sellars via reasonings-by-the-absurd such that thinking can only be a *material doing*); the downstream effects of my own current activity being assumed to be predictable because it – my own activity – is somehow 'felt' or intellectually-intuited as successfully sublimatory, *in media res*, rather than retrospectively, with use-value wrongly viewed as *intuitable qua use-value*, and falsely *opposed* to exchange-value in a rigid register of exclusion and destruction;

(b.) that this access transducts a Marxist theory adequate to transparently (as opposed to dialectically) slice real social function at the joints. Should the categories of 'labour' and 'labour-power' be treated as natural-metaphysical givens with reference to which one could empirically-introspectively 'check' that one was or was not 'alienated'? If they were rather, qua categories, to turn out to be side-effects or 'waste-products' of the socio-practical deadlock which forced this very explanatory theorization in the first place[149], such an assumption would itself begin to look like a reified, undialectical and undynamic relic to be *revized*. And, concomitantly,

[149] We owe our introduction to this 'waste-product' thesis, which seems to us to be in line with the most radical of the value-theorists conclusions, to Nadia Bou Ali's use of the analyses given by Tomšič in *The Capitalist Unconscious* (Ali, symposium presentation, *Communism will be the collective management of alienation*, Fridericianum Kassel, 5 September 2017). If we are not mistaken, towards global capital the Endnotes collective takes an abolitionist stance (associated with the banner of 'communization') which does not, or cannot, rule out the abolition of the centralization of the means of production, in part because they view political economy's category of *labour*, once upon a time rallied around as a supposed reserve of strength, to be itself only meaningful as an impure product-fiction, ideological enabler and structural property of surplus-value extraction. One may thus worry that everything touched by 'labour' is contaminated. To squeeze this complex matter into a single rhetorical question: Why, indeed, would there be any need to classify one's own activity as 'labour' if one's conception of activity had not been effectively seized and reshaped by non-use-creating exchangeability – from which 'labour' distinguishes itself in order to become intelligible – such as to incessantly foist the question of 'productivity' upon the question of

(c.) that thought-categories themselves – be they 'use' or 'labour' or 'labour-power', or 'non-identity' (an Adornian category we will say more about in the next chapter) – are, per se, self-sufficient, as opposed to owing their intelligibility and functionality to the gap of Gödelian-lacanian incompleteness and also to the Laruellean-Hegelain unilateral distinguishment of determinate categoriality from indeterminate non-categoriality, the consequence of which is that the operativity and puissance of concepts is, in-the-first-instance, intra-conceptual, because determined and limited by the relations between concepts and *only* in the epistemically non-determinant, blindspotted last-instance by the relations between concepts and noumena.

This brief diagnosis attempts to unearth and formalize what is wrong with the meta-presuppositions underlying Adorno's 1938 slamming of the spanner-screen metaphor into the path of sublimation; all three assumptions are, from the perspective of Sellars, unacceptable. But the line of critical razor-application which we are claiming to be most important with respect to Adorno's mission in this essay was already discernible with a shallower excavation of his own contradiction of his own (salutary) explicit Kantian-Hegelian meta-presuppositions, meta-presuppositions which are quite closely in line with Sellars's.

To flesh out what I am claiming to be shared by Adorno and Sellars, we may consolidate the details regarding the critique of the Myth of the Given established in our Introduction by distilling the Myth's empiricist variant and then ramping up the neo-Hegelian stakes of Sellars' attack on its intellectualist variant. A telegraphic encapsulation of the former can be gained by citing the inconsistent triad with entrapment in which Sellars charges the classical sense-datum theorist (for which read: sensualist empiricism qua epistemological doctrine from Hume to Russel and beyond):

> A. *X senses red sense content s* entails *x non-inferentially knows that s is red.*
> B. The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired.
> C. The ability to know facts of the form *x is* φ is acquired.

activity? I do not believe it to be entirely obvious that the Lacanian account should be leveraged – as Žižek might perhaps want to do – in order to block the objection to the idea that the only options are total abolition, including of centralized means of production, or a totally blind leap into a 'primordial' or (a)cosmic contingency: the objection which would counter that 'labour' does not exhaust *practice*. Practice is doing: properly conceived doing need not fall prey to mythical transparency. The positing of the drive would appear to entail that *people are in fact unable to stop doing things*, and, if so, the value-form must be inferred to be parasitical upon this doing rather than productive of it as a mirage.

> A and B together entail not-C; B and C entail not-A; A and C entail not-B.[150]

Sellars shows that abandoning any of the three propositions will lead the traditional empiricist into conclusions which will *either* undermine the principle – which she wishes to uphold – of the first-order isomorphic coincidence of sensing and knowing; *or* cut off 'sense-data' from its ordinary-talk counterparts such as 'tickles and itches, etc.'[151]; *or* entail ceding on nominalism such as to risk regressing to a pre-critical unacquired Adamic language wherein thought and thing correspond in a pre-established harmony.[152]

Sellars is a Kantian, but he harbours Hegelian strands, such as may be witnessed in his scientific *realism*. We will therefore not hesitate to exacerbate such tendencies by telegraphically distilling the import of his attack on the intellectualist variant of the Myth of the Given with a slogan in hegelese: nothing is self-sufficient, not even the nothing. It may well be the case that Hegel at certain junctures burns bridges with materialism, but we believe that this is not for want of insights it needs. It is clear that Sellars's critique of 'the entire framework of givenness' aims to shatter the transparency between thoughts and themselves. It is therefore we hope not egregious, as a loaded provocation for examination as we proceed, to place this critique under the banner of one of Hegel's most speculatively stentorian pronouncements (which is, for his key proposals, nonetheless globally non-fungible). This sentence concerning what Hegel calls 'absolute essence', 'the absolute concept', and 'this simple infinity' gives us one possible gloss on the Maoist maxim echoed by Badiou, according to which 'the One divides into Two':

> This self-identical essence is therefore related only to itself; 'to itself' implies relationship to an 'other', and the *relation-to-self* is rather

[150] Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' in Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality.* Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1991, 129-194, 133.

[151] *Ibid*., 134.

[152] Thus for Sellars any relation of *resemblance* between a representation and its targeted represented thing must be scrapped in favour of a (non-given: postulated) 'second order isomorphism' between represented content and the *act* that is the non-conceptual representing-in-itself which produces this content. Some more aspects of Sellars' strategy hereupon will be deployed by us in Chapter 8.

> a *self-sundering*; or, in other words, that very self-identicalness is an inner difference.[153]

With regard, then, to the specificities of the challenge posed by the value-form to sublimation, having rejected the Mythical-Givenist strand of Adorno's essay we hereby fall back upon the account given by Adorno of the commodity fetish as an erroneous desire-trap, and find – as we have already argued – that *nothing in this account* can demonstrate that the possibility of sublimation has been stopped and frozen. Ultimately, the essay continues, in spite of itself, to presuppose that *pleasure* is a necessary feature of sublimation. This is probably why Adorno tends in 1938 towards chronic pessimism on this point. His acute use of Freud to flesh out the theory of the commodity-fetish shows that pleasure must be henceforth suspected as the artist's enemy. This will push him towards reasoning with Schoenberg not only that one should refuse consonance and the resolution of musical quasi-narrative tensions – which musical reconciliation they will view as a mendacious betrayal of the real irreconciliation of social contradictions – but *also* that, through the twelve-tone system of compositional strictures, one should *refuse any pretention on the part of the composer to continue to be capable of decision-construction*.[154]

Why go this far? Because Adorno does not have to hand Lacan's separation of pleasure firstly from enjoyment, the inertial glue concomitant with the *unavoidable necessity* of binding the drive in either a placating symptom or a sublimation (or certainly in the former, and optionally in the latter), and, secondly, from desire, which for Lacan is ultimately the non-satiable hunger *of reason itself*.

This latter point is crucial. We have argued that Adorno's most subtle commitments and acute conclusions entail and require the 'spontaneity' of Kantian reason. The consequence of this which Adorno does not here acknowledge is that *the corruption of pleasure itself, and the very conundrum posed by the fetish* – the error which this fetish has been unveiled to be, and the questions this unveiling allows to be posed – not only *cannot* block formal-mereological

---

[153] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford: OUP, 1977, 100. Terry Pinkard translates the sentence as (Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. & ed. Terry Pinkard, Cambridge: CUP, 2018, 98; Pinkard's interposition):

> This self-equal essence relates itself only to itself. It relates itself *to itself* so that this is an other essence to which the relation directs itself, and the *relating to itself* is in fact [the act of] *estranging*, or it is that very self-equality which is inner difference.

[154] Schoenberg is here – if taken at face value – secessionist or globally abolitionist with respect to the possibility of seizing upon the sonic detritus and contradictions *of the commodity-regime itself* as materials fit for working with in musical sublimation.

construction (even as they may or may not suck the pleasure out of it), but themselves must fall under the investigatory scrutiny and probing of reason's hungry curiosity, such that they themselves become grist to the mill of artistic sublimation.

Reason necessarily always 'one-ups' the other faculties, and does so – or *in principle* can always do so – with *all* of the pertinent information in hand – however partial, obscure, and contradictory this information is. Pleasure is not a motor: the drive and desire are (non-substantial) motors. And the key thrust of Adorno's intervention is that music is always socio-politically-dialectically entangled: (a) as an evaluator, asking 'What is good?' (i.e., 'What is sublimatory?') and 'What is bad?'; and, (b) as an investigator launched into a forward-driven discovery of the properties of sonic-material narrative and anti-narrative constructible properties. As musical construction is seen by Adorno as full-bloodedly cognitive-synthetic, it is not clear that he has any possibility available to him for construing reification as frozen solid and definitively stoppered. Sublimation does not have to be 'pleasurable', because it is a putting-to-work of a drive and a desire deriving from reason's own incompleteness, the compulsion springing from which it binds in commitments capable of discovering-constructing ramifying truths in the form of determinate negations of illusions or otherwise revisable instances. The commodity-fetish itself is an illusion *for* a confused reason, which is still *reason*, and so is still possessed of 'empty spontaneity': thus the chief condition of value-form reification is exactly the same as the chief condition of the reflexive (albeit broken-looped) and recursively augmenting spontaneous cognitive activity which is always able at least to *put into question any limit posed to it*. If this reasoning holds, neither one of (a) the fetish-error, or (b) 'empty' freedom (qua the in-principle possibility of sublimatory activity), insofar as they share conditions-of-effectivity, could ever blot out the other. The corollary of this – as Adorno himself will soon realise – is that a full explanatory account of *what is really wrong* with the reign of the value-form – of why we should aim for its overcoming; of its injustice *and also its untruth* –, not being able to rely on any occlusion of, or alienation from, a substantial quasi-empirical (so to speak) delicious spongey 'use-value cake', will need to look into aspects of social-transcendental (and we should add with Feuerbach, and Marx himself: real-practical) function extending well beyond the error-trap aspect of the commodity-fetish. To this end, we propose that both use-value and exchange-value will need to be assimilated to a desubstantialized, non-empirical conception of function (i.e., of non-Aristotelian *doing* and *happening*), with the stranglehold that exchange-value comes to exert upon practice being derived from the complex involutive interactions of functions across the levels (non-exclusively) of (a) unconscious-opaque social practice, (b) reason and its neuroses, and (c) phantasy-imaginary imago-error.

Chapter 4
Inexhaustible Goldmines

In this chapter we will extend our account of Adorno's 1938 slippage vis-à-vis his own warnings against the Myth of the non-categorial Given – without at all wanting to deny the perspicacity and cutting originality of the treatment he quickly developed on this very theme – before launching a few open questions regarding time and temporality, and the status of novelty.

1. *Non-identity and* Aufhebung

It may admittedly have been uncharitable of us not to have let the 'alien screen' mentioned in Adorno's essay pass simply as a metaphor or synecdoche for the theatre of desire wherein no-one manages to shake off the seduction of the value-form's monopolising fake promise of agency. After all, when he measuredly praises the strategy adopted by Schoenberg Adorno quite obviously *does* assume that people in fact *are* still capable both of 'hearing' moments in a minimally musically pertinent way, and of grasping synthetic-dialectical implications regarding socio-political totality embodied in musical (non- or anti-)totalities. What Adorno appreciates in Schoenberg is the commitment according to which, as we have just seen, and as Wim Mertens puts it, henceforth '[a]rt refuses reconciliation because as far as general social contradictions are concerned, this reconciliation could only be an illusion.'[155] However, what we have here is a 'dialectical anti-dialectical' shape which Adorno will go on to deploy, in his work with Max Horkheimer and his *Magnum Opus* of 1966, *Negative Dialectics*, on the deepest meta-cognitive level – or rather, on the level of what is for him the somewhat 'brutal' forcing of the non-logical fissure or cut between the blindspot of the absent unmediated in-itself and mediated thought. As Mertens tersely and unfussily summarises,

> Negative dialectics do not lead to a synthesis, because the dialectic has become trapped in the contradiction, hence negative dialectics: a synthesis is no longer possible, only a type of dialectic which remains in the position of contradiction.[156]

The development that occurs in Adorno's work is that what is singled out as the subjugator to myth of auto-deploying compulsion is less and less the value-form per se, and more and more a metaphysical variant of the 'principle of identity' ensuing from it. Adorno comes to accuse Hegel of imposing this principle on the dialectic. The proposal is that what is at fault is that tendency within the rambling, but increasingly locked-in, trajectory of *Geist* whereby subject

[155] Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, trans. J. Hautekiet, London: Kahn & Averill, 1983, 114.

[156] Mertens, *American Minimal Music,* 114.

and object, thought and thing, cognition and cognized are viewed as identical (albeit in-the-last-instance). For Adorno this is a violent suffocation of the object, because it – the object – is by definition incommensurable and non-identical with the thought that tries to represent it. He therefore insists upon the radicality of this gap or split of the non-identity of-the-first-instance – and, for him, *also of-the-last-instance* – between concept and object.

However, remaining committed to the dialectical method, for the reasons sketched above, he is fully aware that identity qua logical function is inherent to thought and so cannot be leap-frogged or snuck up on from behind by thought. This entails that 'non-identity' itself is a determination of thought. In consequence, Adorno seeks to remain a full-blooded dialectician *while* enacting a practice of thinking that would refuse *Aufhebung* by effectuating what has been deduced (from the reasoned rejection of identity) to be the non-identity and incommensurability of *cogitans* and *cogitandum*. Thus, if theoretical practice is to tear down sublating conclusion-solutions as mendacious, and to seek to further crack open and explore the specific historical contradictions of its epoch, it is not simply because the value-form is a false commensurator, but rather because the object-crushing totalising-commensurating epochal principle-of-'identity-thinking' is not only a product but also a conditioning ground of the value-form's own effectivity. As such *this* is the magic circle – a meta-cognitive one – which needs to be dislocated and smashed, from the inside. 'Non-identity' is what stalls the dialectic in its contradictions: we suggest then that the metaphor of the spanner in the works of reason's own over-arching 'empty spontaneity' cannot help but reappear, for as far as we can see one component of Adorno's project now is that of cauterising *Aufhebung* per se. This latter – sublation – is understood (on the Hegelian account) as a non-trivial shift in the possible conceptualisations of the totality of the situation which results retroactively from the reorganisation of conceptual resources and the ramification of thinkable pathways for investigation concomitant with reason's asymptotic and non-linear integration of all of its available knowledge – artistic, political, scientific – into a plastic-revisable totality. This integrating schematisation is carried out – according to the (non-Aristotelian) defender of Hegel – precisely in order to try to make contradictions legible in the first place, for unless these undecidables appear they cannot force the decisions which may lead to acts breaking the magic circles yoking thinking beings and leading to new discernments of contradiction. For Adorno, on the contrary, the gap between thought and thing blocks sublation – and *this* is what breaks the circle and effectuates freedom.

Allow us to cite a few passages from *Negative Dialectics*, in a scatter-shot fashion, in order to give a rough impression of how Adorno pursues this:

> Whatever of the truth can be gleaned through concepts beyond their abstract circumference, can have no other staging-grounds than that which is suppressed, disparaged and thrown away by concepts. The

utopia of cognition would be to open up the non-conceptual with concepts, without making it the same as them.[157]

Consciousness

has the capacity to see through the identity-principle, but cannot be thought without the identification; every determination is an identification. But precisely this approaches what the object is, as non-identical: by stamping it, it wishes to be stamped by it. Non-identity is secretly the *telos* of the identification, it is what is to be rescued in the latter; the mistake of traditional thought is that identity is held for its goal. The power which explodes the appearance [*Schein*] of identity is that of thinking itself: the application of its "that is" shakes its nevertheless inalienable form. The cognition of the non-identical is dialectical too, in the sense that it identifies more, and identifies differently, than identity-thinking. It wishes to say what something would be, while identity-thinking says what it falls under, what it is an example or representative of, what it consequently is not itself.[158]

The contradiction is the non-identical under the aspect of identity; the primacy of the principle of contradiction in dialectics measures what is heterogenous in unitary thinking. By colliding against its own borders, it reaches beyond itself. Dialectics is the consistent consciousness of non-identity.[159]

Identity and contradiction in thinking are welded to one another. The totality of the contradiction is nothing other than the untruth of the total identification, as it is manifested in the latter. Contradiction is non-

[157] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. Dennis Redmond, 2001 [1966]. http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ndtrans.html, 21 (page numbers are according to Redmond's indications of those of the German original). The print translation is Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, NY: Continuum, 2007.

[158] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 152. Redmond's interposition.

[159] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 17.

> identity under the bane [*Bann*] of the law, which also influences the non-identical.
>
> [...] This law is however not one of thinking, but real. Whoever submits to dialectical discipline, must unquestionably pay with the bitter sacrifice of the qualitative polyvalence of experience. The impoverishment of experience through dialectics, which infuriates mainstream opinion, proves itself however to be entirely appropriate to the abstract monotony of the administered world.[160]
>
> If [Kantian] causality as a subjective thought-principle is tainted with absurdity, if there is no cognition however completely without the former, then one would need to seek out a moment in it, which is itself not thinking. What is to be learned from causality, is what identity perpetrated upon the non-identical. The consciousness of causality is, as that of lawfulness, the consciousness of this; as the critique of cognition, also that of the subjective appearance [*Schein*] in the identification. Reflective causality points to the idea of freedom as the possibility of non-identity.[161]

This work constitutes a reinsertion of the unfortunately neglected question of the negative noumenon back into the interpretation of Hegel, issuing a Kantian kickback to theologizing readings and stubbornly insisting on what might (intrepidly) be seen as a renegade-Platonic separation of Truth-qua-Truth-in-itself from the categories and concepts featuring in judgements about it. This has consequences for thinking about time, which we will presently look into. We in no way intend to question the urgent depth and nuance Adorno here attains. However, *if* a contention of his were to be found to be that there is a thought-determination – that of non-identity – that could stop and rend asunder dialectical construction-discovery and the determinate negation of thought-determinations by other thought-determinations, it seems to us that this would again violate Sellars' proscription of intellectualist Mythical-Givenness.

Concepts for Sellars are sets of rules for connecting spatio-temporal determinations – and nothing more than this. Rules are not substances, and nor are they causes. The question of what concepts are can only be asked from a position already *in media res*, because the fact of question-asking presupposes a conceptual framework as its condition. The conceptual-symbolic order, qua

[160] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 18. Importantly, Ashton tends to translate *Bann* as 'spell'.

[161] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 266. First interposition mine, second Redmond's.

signifying system, is open-endedly self-revisable. No thought-determination is a transparent Aristotelian essence; all are mediated. It is the default of substance which causes the noumenon to *epistemically* (but not ontologically) recede into an underdetermination so sheer that the mission of discovering-constructing new determinations must admit that its only leverageable resources for decisions over criteria-setting are those of mediation itself. The important Sellarsian point is that because thought itself, qua logical-spontaneous, is neither causally constrained nor substantial, to attempt to curb its spontaneity with an instance supposed to be exterior to it (to thought) is to commit a category-error. A logico-cognitive category such as non-identity cannot crush *any* other logico-cognitive category, and nor can it – on pain of intellectualist Mythical-Givenism – block the constructivist vector pledged to discovering inconsistencies in the optic of decided-upon cobbled-together plastic-revisable totalities possessed of an aimed-at but always-failed-and-cracked logical consistency, which vector *is all the dialectic is*, because the other logico-cognitive categories through which this vector proceeds are constructed clusters of rules in precisely the same way that 'non-identity' is a constructed cluster of rules.

Once we have thus traversed Kant with the help of Sellars, thereby arriving back at Hegel, the status of 'categories' as real-effective in-themselves has to be tackled: the categories-in-themselves. The Adornian response on this point will be the following. 'Being' is a cypher for 'identity', and so when, at the opening of the *Logic*, Hegel aims to show that the inscription (the inscribability) of Being presupposes Nothing – from which it distinguishes itself without Nothing distinguishing itself from it in return, because 'pure Being' is simply empty indeterminate immediacy – this is to say that the identity-to-itself of any category presupposes the non-identity from which identity must distinguish itself, rendering it (identity) incapable of pretending to any closed loop of autonomous self-causedness or self-grounding.[162] But this anti-Aristotelian reading of Hegel – which would be spot on, as far as it goes – does not entail that non-identity can make the dialectic – which, on anti-Aristotelian grounds, is per se a dialectic between logical consistency and logical inconsistency – halt. That non-identity be non-dogmatically deduced as

[162] I draw here on a recording of a lecture course on Hegel given by Mladen Dolar at the American University of Beirut, 2016 or 2017. As an aside, Gabriel Catren has indicated that with respect to mathematics, where the self-identity of posits is a formal stipulation, nonetheless, in mathematical metamathematics, 'category theory' has (in our own paraphrase) 'unthinged' this property by requiring that in any given case a posit must show the operation or operations by which it identifies itself with itself. A proposal as this study proceeds will be that desubstantialization is a *condition* of the *absoluteness* (in German the *Unbedingtheit*, in literal morphological transliteration 'unthingedness') of a determinacy. Another proposal will be that one cannot posit any determinateness without also positing the *act* or *happening* of its determination.

nothing other than the necessary empty caesura or dislocated cut in the failed closure of the loop of the self-grounding of the de facto illusion of self-giving categorial self-identity implies that, qua unsublateable blindspot, it (non-identity) has *no substantiality*. At the same time, it is endowed with the launching the dialectic in the first place – for without the *semblance* of unified self-identity there can be no dialectic. The only way to force non-identity to hobble the continuation of the dialectic – which is non-linear, because drastically error-prone and reliant on owls which fly only at dusk – is to reify non-identity as a substantial void – if you will, a void-spanner this time hurled by an exterior positively negative and ineffable Gaia – and clearly this scraps Adorno's own precautions.

Adorno is right to insist on the 'negativity' of the concept-object gap, and to refuse any reconciling englobement of contradictions that does not lead to further new investigateable contradictions. However, he risks eliding epistemic and ontological registers in his account of the negative gap, which for Sellars is epistemic but *not ontological*, meaning that Sellars makes Hegelianism salvageable without inflating knowing into a commensurating monster with a God-complex neurotically *papier-mâché*-ing the fissures of non-identity. Sellars can be read as reaffirming the Hegelian identity-in-the-last-instance of subjectivity and objectivity, of phenomenon and noumenon, but *only* in-the-last-instance, and this as part of his key research strand of rubbishing the classical correspondence-by-resemblance account of true representation without losing true representings.

But, most importantly in this context, if non-identity is called upon to *jam* the dialectic, *stopping* it in an articulation of certain contradictions rather than others, be this in solicitation of the rationale that *Aufhebung* mendaciously asphyxiates the negativity of the incommensurable object not-identical to the concept, it is far from clear how this can be made to stick without, in fact, tacitly re-operationalising the correspondence-by-resemblance theory of representation. For the negative gap to turn into a substantial void-spanner will require that speaking of or inscribing the void involves speaking of or inscribing a self-causing, real-ly effective (*wirklich*) emptiness, of which the intelligibility is unmediated and simply given. This would be a presupposition mortgaged to intellectualist Mythical-Givenism, and one proceeding along the lines of a metaphysical deployment of the classical correspondence-theory of representation, whereby, language being viewed as a nomenclature, voids are taken to do what language says they do. We do not see why Adorno's welcome critical reading of Hegel need proceed to these self-undermining lengths: *Aufhebung* can rather be read as a non-linear movement that can lead to new and fruitful contradictions *only* at the risk of the regressive generation of new illusions, which regressions can nonetheless (at least in principle) be recursively reinscribed. And we remain convinced that Adorno's important early entwinement of musical sublimation with socio-political conflict-shapes looks very much like a construal of sublimation as a type of, or isomorph of, nothing other than *this very sublation – without* any 'home' of 'primordial' non-identity of the

sort from which one could be alienated or to which one could return. If there has never been any im-mediacy for thought nor for experience, then we have never had any to lose.

2. *Temporalities and non-time*

Speaking of non-linearity, and quite apart from the 'catastrophic' periodisation of the history of music implied in the Adornian non-isolation of musical practice from socio-cultural conditions, it would be remiss not to reflect upon time and temporality, since these themes are central not only to the definition of what music is but also to that of the dialectic per se. Adorno's never-wavering commitment to the dialectical method quite quickly soured him towards Schoenberg's dodecaphonism. High serialism had exasperatedly 'expulsed' all decisional subjectivity and outward-looking curiosity from the strictures of its procedure. But Adorno rapidly comes to view this expulsion's grain of truth as residing in an untenable nostalgia for a comfortably self-verifying bourgeois autonomy, and speedily comes to interpret the gesture as a tantrum in the face of industrial capital's obvious squashing of this notion.

However, a composer about whose music Adorno had been consistently sniffy is Stravinsky. If the goal of music is a failure-prone sublimation in ramifying path-dependent, generically platform-entrenching and platform-abandoning accruals of part-whole interplay-construction moves, and if this can only proceed under a socio-political conditioning wherein one criterion of success is the sloughing off of the magic circle's enclosure, then does it not follow that among the conditions which *reason faces up to* in music is temporality itself? Indeed, 'Adorno regarded music as a dialectical confrontation with the progress of time.'[163] On Adorno's reading, Stravinsky aims – in a manner which we assume may have been inspirational for Cage, Reich, and Glass – at some kind of exit from dialectical, quasi-narrative 'teleological' structure by means of aleatory or non-developmental – and hence 'atemporal' in the sense of non-directional – strategies of musical structuration. We can see that for Adorno this is probably going to look a lot like opting out of the possibility of non-ersatz satisfaction in favour of a fetishized-nostalgic, faux-pagan-folkloristic, undemanding and consequenceless cyclicality of time which will numb the drive while remaining captive to the illusory sheen of aloof eternalness accruing to the value-form. Adorno objects to Stravinsky that '[a]s a temporal art, music is bound to the fact of succession and is hence as irreversible as time itself. By starting, it commits itself to carrying on, to becoming something new, to developing.'[164]

---

[163] Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 116.

[164] Adorno, 'Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait', in *Quai una fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, London/NY: Verso, 1998 [1963], 150-151.

Our interrogation will thus involve noting that for Kant successional temporality applies to the phenomenon, and not to the noumenon, which is atemporal. However, Hegel and Sellars affirm the identity of-the-last-instance of subject and object, which for Sellars entails the goal of the stereoscopic fusion of manifest and scientific images of man in the world. The Hegelian stance is that there is, in a sense, something *wrong* with the appearances, that they are shot-through with error, illusion, and contradiction insofar as things-in-themselves (which *do* have *some kind* of structure) do not – could not – appear as they really are. As time is not an in-itself, and, indeed, as temporalities are plural, on this account time *as we experience it* must be viewed as *some kind of* illusion – to which must immediately be added that, if so, it can only be an illusion of overwhelming determinant effectivity for thinking and speaking animals, and indeed for all biological organisms. There is a reality or a real and an effectivity *of illusion*: it is Lacan's claim that humans can't do anything without the support of the phantasy, with which they must work in order not to be tyrannised by the symptom, and for Sellars the entire manifest image, including experiential-phenomenological temporality, is *in some sense false*. However, this Kantian-Hegelian-Platonic *knowledge* of the illusory nature of the appearances, the advent of the (epistemic-formal) separation in knowledge of phenomenon and noumenon, is itself not without effective consequences, and nor is the modern-scientific postulation and mathematical modelling of physical, Boltzmannian-thermodynamic non-experiential temporalities. A quasi-theatrical or narrative temporality is part and parcel of politics conceived as conflictual, and the concepts of desire and the drive don't make sense without time. It seems that humans cannot dispense with time: without the separation of the temporal from the non-temporal, the question of freedom doesn't arise. Knowledge itself has a temporal condition, even if in-the-last-instance and in-itself what is really going on, or not going on, may or may not be 'atemporal'. John MacTaggart in a 1908 essay even goes so far as to deny *all* objective reality to time (Sellars does not do this), a move which Reza Negarestani, in resonance with our take on Laruelle, has dubbed 'hyper-Kantian'[165]. From this perspective – and putting the emphasis on Hegel – music being a dialectical confrontation with time has to mean that it confronts the *split* between time and non-time, deploying the non-temporal (non-substantial) as the cutting edge to drive sublimation forwards. Further, as the above would seem to imply that the physico-metaphysical temporal in-itself is in some sense *non-successional* (cf. Chapter 7 below), and as modern science for Sellars does encroache cognitively upon the noumenon, music under this condition of modernity can investigate the dividing-line threshold of time as mathematically conceived (the scientific image,

[165] Reza Negarestani, Chapter 4: 'Some Unsettling Kantian News, as Delivered by Boltzmann (An Excursion into Time)', in Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, Falmouth/NY: Urbanomic/Sequence, 2018, 201-248, 205.

the impersonal Universe) with time as politically, desiringly-subjectively conceived (the manifest image, the narrative World) – and this is arguably something done, in a specific way, by Cage *et al.* However, as the stochastic qua stochastic and not qua anything else can only be mathematically conceived, I would concur with Mertens' use of Adorno in his argument that any claim of the Stravinskian lineage to have 'escaped' dialectics[166] is ideological, and would suggest that the upshot is that it is hard to conceive of music that would expurgate every quasi-narrative vestige.

Non-dialectical elements are undoubtedly a real concern of modern experimental music. It would be completely ridiculous, for example, to accuse Xenakis's 1954 composition *Metastasis* – in which the density of sound produced by the orchestra propels the speed of the playing, in the absence of thematic development, musically enacting an Einsteinian convertibility between matter, energy, and time – of slyly hiding a three-act pantomime up its sleeve. But the claim that non-dialectical music could be non-dialectical in pure isolation from and independently of a 'quasi-narrative' dialectic precisely *between the implicated non-dialectical elements and the implicated dialectical elements* would seem to require the dubious assumption that music could continue to be music in the absence of desire. In the example of *Metastasis* the pertinent dialectic would concern the question of the relation between the Idea of the irreversible directionality of the 'arrow' of agential time on the one hand, and, on the other, the Idea of a spatialized reversibility in the temporality of inorganic physics. The intelligibility of this is premised upon a

---

[166] Such as, for example, claims made by Stockhausen reported by Mertens (*American Minimal Music*, 101-102):

> Stockhausen's *Moment-form* is based on intensities, no precise line of development can be predicted and each moment may be one of minimal or maximal intensity. Only the experience of the moment is important. This situation comes very close to Stoianova's definition of repetitive music as a monadic music. The work as it is performed but is but a fragment of a more permanent work: 'These pieces have always existed and will go on forever.' Stockhausen rejected dialectical time, so characteristic of traditional Western music, in favour of the actual time of the moment. He stated that: 'Either every moment is important or nothing is important. A moment is not simply the result of preceding moments, nor the anticipation of moments to come. It is a personal, centred entity, with its own existence. A moment is not a fraction of a time-line, not a particle lasting a measured length of time. Instead, concentration on the *now* makes vertical incisions in the horizontal line of time to reach timelessness, which is what I call eternity: an eternity that does not begin where time has ended but that can be reached at any moment' Concentration on the *now* leads, as it does in repetitive music, to an extrapolation, a macro-time beyond history, 'a tendency to surmount finite time and death', says Stockhausen.

wider dialectic between time and non-time, and none of it makes any sense without the will-to-know… which requires the operativity of the drive.

On a general philosophical level, it would seem that the chicanes of the dialectic of desubstantialization from Hegel to today debouche in the Lacanian-Sellarsian conclusion that the very element of thought and experience is precisely nothing other than determinate *illusion* and non-trivially ramified *error*. As nothing is simply given, the Absolute – that which is addressed to everyone and no one in particular – can only be conceived as what *will have been* constructed-discovered, what has already been constructed being hostage to the contingency of given temporality, which we are compelled to try to transform or reshape to the degree that we have conceived of the possibility that we might be able to transform or reshape it.

3. *Sublimating sublimation*

Two further conclusions stemming from the compossibilization here broached turn out to be of importance. Hereupon we will allow ourselves a polemical tone, simply in the wish of communicating to the reader that it is here that we believe to be found the heftiest stakes of the discussion that has occupied this Section. The first conclusion concerns the work we may expect to be done by the concept of sublimation itself.

That sublimation could ever rely on the merest smidgen of a simply-given criterion or on any second-order, checkable bet-hedging success-index – beyond those goals it decides to set for itself – is, from any angle, a pernicious mirage. Real-ly lacking a home, sublimation has to despoil the fake recipes telling it how to concoct and entrench one, breaking them up into a nothing which may, without guarantee, help to further unleash it.[167] Ideological myths about how sublimation is supposed to proceed abound: unless it defines itself with skeletal minimality it will fall time and again into the thrall of the soporific, necessarily *contemplative* modality of these myths. However, as the creeping inertia of the tendency to placation in facile – perverted or obsessional – contemplation is inevitable, and nothing to be ashamed of, one can't help concluding that something that art can and, at least sometimes, should or must do is to – hysterically or psychotically – punch its way out of the empirico-substantialist straightjacket into which it tendentially ends up being strapped, by doing what needs to be done to fray it, make it crumble, and tear it asunder – this 'it' being *determinate and historically specific*. This is not to sideline the Poundian imperative to 'Make it new!', but rather to take it entirely seriously. Getting out of

[167] Our interpretation of Marx leads us to ponder: Would postulating a lost past cornucopia of use-values, irretrievable under x or y condition, not risk turning the lost modalities into things separate in-themselves from mediation? And would this not presuppose being able to straightforwardly, and with certainty, draw the line between what is possible and what is impossible now?

the straightjacket can only be done by doing something relatively new, and within the straightjacket no absolutely new things can be done. Believing in a sublimation-substance, the value-theorist may quip, is a version of Stockholm syndrome and can only tighten the straps by preventing the decisions which constitute sublimation's happening from being made – although under no circumstances is sublimation simply inevitable. The necessity of determinately negating the varying guises of the guidebook-to-sublimation means that sublimation is necessarily *dialectical*, and reveals that the very concept is, importantly, formal, and inherently 'vacuous' in that its meaning is oppositional-exclusionary. Its opposite is not 'repression' – because the drive has been desubstantialized and is not a hydraulic pressure or force, and also because desire lacks given ends that could be repressed – but simply a repetitive and (transcendentally) boring bad infinity consisting in the overdetermination of activity by non-committal perversion. What should be spelt out and stressed is that, beyond (crucially) formalizing the breaking of the magic circle, the concept of sublimation alone can't tell you how exactly to achieve it, or, for that matter, why ultimately you should bother. It cannot be mistaken for a gate – however strait – allowing for a quick escape from the Problem of Nihilism. The mythological name of Orpheus is only the mythological name of Orpheus. I would not hesitate to conclude that the only way out of the threatened dead-end is to stop artificially isolating music from theoretical cogitation – *including* of the most 'infuriatingly' 'ascetic' and 'austere' abstract-formal or quasi-mathematical kind – by going the whole anti-substantialist dialectical hog in the manner suggested by Adorno's proposal that, on one level, mereology is socio-political. The type of thinking which tackles the problem of nihilism is, at least in part, a philosophical type of thinking, and isolating it from artistic procedures, or artistic procedures from it, or either from political procedures, lacks justification. Concomitantly, artistic practice has no monopoly on sublimation.

But concerning music we can say that, while Schopenhauer and the young Nietzsche are right – anachronistically speaking – to view its non-representational aspect as enacting a pulsation modelled directly upon the repetition-compulsion itself, inscribing this within sonority without need of representing it as this or that, they lapse into a metaphysical modality of representing and undermine this insight when they hypostasize compulsion *per se* into the Will. Why other types of inscription, such as the mathematical (cf. Lacan), are skipped over as candidates by them no doubt has something to do with this. Furthermore, we believe that Schopenhauer's invocation of Platonic Ideas with respect to musical cadences and rhythms would be sharpened rather than disposed of by removing his metaphysical inflation of non-representational practice such as to allow a dialectic between musical non-representational *and representational* aspects.[168]

[168] Schopenhauer raises the connection between music and the Ideas, only quickly to dismiss it, in Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea, Vol. III*, trans. R. B. Haldane & J. Kemp, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1909, Project Gutenburg EBook, 2012, 227. If we take seriously such a non-

4. *Raising the question of Novelty*

This begs the question of novelty. How much of this can one aim to obtain? What are the better and worse types of novelty?

We shall propose, in agreement with Badiou, that non-abstract (concrete) novelty must indeed bring to bear a torsion or forcing upon finite limitations 'in the name of eternity', but, *pace* Badiou's own account (to be reviewed in Chapter 6), this negation must be *determinate* and must not artificially and undialectically separate different areas of practice (i.e., construction-discovery and after-the-fact theoretical meta-formalization). It – determinate negation – may therefore demand admitting that art might not be an inexhaustible productive stomping ground after all –

---

representational-representational musical dialectic, it seems we can ask interesting questions about the sensitivity of musical sublimation to historical context, while perhaps also relating Hegelian atemporal Ideas to passing transience. Reflecting upon avant-garde and fringe-popular music, we might ask: Has there not recently been a slight dulling of the subversive edge of groups using stumbled upon inputs in the shape of abrasively distorted tape samples, or pulsating unrelentingly mechanical rhythmic onslaughts, such as the UK's Throbbing Gristle or Spain's Esplendor Geometrico, both formed in the mid- to late- 1970s? Were this hypothesis to be accepted, we might conjecture that their *innovations* result, or resulted, through *what they negate*. Perhaps the determinate negation they carry out is now more or less of a *fait accompli*, with new sonic or narrative-ideological shibboleths or semblances having been generated in the meantime. If we were to press on this proposal for musical sublimation as *determinate* negation – and it is certainly far from clear that Adorno would accept it – we would have to grant that there must be qualitatively differentiated shibboleths cropping up *before* the musician can come along to reap a new musical-logical irreversibility from them. As 'free inputs' and unrelenting mechanism are arguably negations of narrativity as such, it may be that conditions have now shifted allowing for interesting negations of anti-narrative. What then is involved in artfully slowing down and arranging passages of 1980s chart hits, revealing production-values at odds with, or in grotesquerie of, the commercial sheen of the source material – but nonetheless achieving a formal progression – as has done Ramona Xavier? And what irreversible Ideas might be said to be constructed-discovered in Fatima Al Qadiri's EP *Desert Strike* (2012), inspired by an eponymous video game based on combat events taking place during the Gulf War? Here synthesized Gregorian chant, war sound-effects, and bright childlike cinematic motifs constitute halting variations on themes, implicating the sonata. The hunch is that the idea of a contradictory threshold of confrontation between non-representational and representational elements might allow for deepening the *qualitative* effects and powers accruing to sequencing and other differentiable aspects of musical temporality. But this idea of innovation as determinate negation would appear – to reiterate – to require that some new semblance or lure has presented itself to be negated. And Adorno does in fact touch upon something parallel to this at the opening of *Aesthetic Theory* when he remarks upon the boredom of the wealthy patrons of Mozart's epoch, commissioning distraction without knowing what they would receive.

or at least, not without the lifting of certain constraints bearing upon it, which lifting it may not be able to carry out on its own, and in which conceptual formalization and – I hazard – *Aufhebung* will have a role to play. Nonetheless, Badiou is aware of the just-flagged quibble. He acknowledges that it might be a good idea

> not to obsessed with formal novelty. I think it's a great question today because the desire for novelty is the desire for new forms, an infinite desire for new form. The obsession of new forms, the artistic obsession with novelty, of critique, of representation and so on, is really not a critical position about capitalism because capitalism itself is the obsession of novelty and perpetual renovation of forms. You have a computer, but the following year it's not the true computer, you need a new one. You have a car, but the coming year it's an old car [...] It's a possibility that the real desire, which is subversive desire is the desire of eternity. The desire for something which is a stability, something which is art, something which is closed in itself. I don't think it's quite like that, but it's a possibility [...][169]

If music can, as has here been objected to Adorno's pessimistic moment, never become *in principle* irreversibly, chronically boring and non-sublimatory – although *de facto* it may endure lengthy dry spells – perhaps the positive reason for this is that, as a modality of confrontation with temporality per se, it is a peculiarly good place for the repetition-compulsion to come face to face with the problematic idea of saying goodbye to a metaphysically substantialized Absolute inexhaustible novelty.

Nonetheless, the status of novelty is an extremely difficult issue. It seems that it cannot be swept under the philosophical carpet. Wouldn't ceding it entail ceding transformation, and a collapse into quietism?

The obscene superegoic injunction to enjoy and to ceaselessly produce more and more Newness is a condition specific to the magic circle of late capitalism. But the split between time and non-time is itself not a condition but determinatively *real*. The torsion brought by the eternal upon the temporal finite is, however, a torsion only by and through reason, which abhors the substantialization turning infinity into an *indeterminately self-replenishing* goldmine. Spurious infinity rears its head if sublation as 'yet more novelty' is not itself sublated. For this, it seems that *determinate* criteria of better and worse novelty are needed. Regarding the former, in art things that help to draw the practical consequences of the critique of political economy may spring

[169] Badiou, 'Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art', 12.

to mind – including new know-hows that hurt our own phantasy-pabula saps to perversion. The fetishization of novelty is itself a theme to be treated by art.

We will argue that there is no 'either-or' choice to be made between: on the one hand, the irreversible succession of historical temporality; and, on the other hand, non-directional reversible non-succession in the in-itself, Boltzmannian temporality, and the real of preserved causal-nomological invariances through mathematization – because modern science is a historical condition of the rejection of the Myth of the Given.

Section III
Desubstantializing the Infinite

Chapter 5
Limit and the *ought*

1. *The Kantian 'boundary'*

Kant erects a fixed barrier between what we can hope to know (albeit incompletely) and the facelessly unknowable 'thing-in-itself'. He does not rule out cognitive progress entirely, but rather argues that the special sciences *can* – but can *only* – seek to move towards completeness by moving from one established transcendentally conditioned piece of knowledge to another new transcendentally conditioned piece of knowledge, within the realm of a 'merely phenomenal' synthetic a priori. In the *Prolegomena*, he analogizes this state of affairs by distinguishing 'limits' (*Grenze*) from 'boundaries' (or 'bounds': *Schrenke*). The concept of 'limit' is merely the negation of a quantity's completeness. Limits are thus germane to mathematics and the natural sciences, which can, and more or less often do, surpass, shift and reconfigure the lines between what they take to be known and what they take to be not-known. A 'boundary', to the contrary, is like the fence around a field with *something* on the other side of it – perhaps, but doubtfully, and only perhaps, another field – from acceding to which something we are blocked by, as it were, logical electrified barbed wire or a particularly thick transcendent fog.

> Boundaries (in extended things) always presuppose a space that is found outside a certain fixed location, and that encloses that location; limits require nothing of the kind, but are mere negations that affect a magnitude insofar as it does not possess absolute completeness.[170]

> As long as the cognition of reason is homogeneous, definite bounds to it are inconceivable. In mathematics and in natural philosophy human reason admits of limits, but not of bounds, viz., that something indeed lies without it, at which it can never arrive, but not that it will at any point find completion in its internal progress. The enlarging of our views in mathematics, and the possibility of new discoveries, are infinite; and the same is the case with the discovery of new properties of nature, of

[170] Kant, *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics,* trans. & ed. Gary Hatfield, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 103-4. We cite this exegetically crucial dual definition from the translation by Hatfield, as we find it to be crisper than the rendering given by Paul Carus. All subsequent quotations from the *Prolegomena* will however be from Carus's translation, as we have on the most part found it to be clearer for our purposes.

> new powers and laws, by continued experience and its rational combination.[171]

Boundaries will nonetheless turn out to be pertinent to blockading pure reason from charging headlong into the self-stymying metaphysical investigations it compels itself into wanting to make. '[T]he human understanding is discursive, and can only cognise by means of general concepts', unlike the understanding that would be possessed by the Supreme Being, who could 'directly perceive its objects', the finite human understanding is constrained to receive the determinacy of the object in spatio-temporal affection through sensibility before organizing it 'under rules of the unity of consciousness'[172] in predicative judgments. (Should such judgements be matched up with a quotidian conception of propositional utterance[173] then Kantian subjectivity would emerge as a speechifier.) But the concepts furnished to reason by the understanding – including the *concepts of* space and time – serve only for knowing the sensible empirical world, and this

> sensuous world is nothing but a chain of appearances connected according to universal laws; it has therefore no subsistence by itself; it is not the thing in itself, and consequently must point to that which contains the basis of this experience[174]

Finding the understanding's resources to be in this way lacking in their reach, reason builds and posits its own Ideas in order to seek satisfaction by asking metaphysical questions about noumena. These are the 'transcendental Ideas' which, as they pose unanswerable questions, immediately thrust reason into a maze of contradictions, such as for instance not being able to choose between believing that the world has a starting point in time or believing that it does not have a starting point in time; the Cosmological Idea here at fault is that of a unified World. The Psychological Idea is that of an immaterial Soul; and the Theological Idea is that of a Supreme Being, God.

---

[171] Kant, *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Paul Carus, Eternal Sun Books, 2017, 81.

[172] Kant, *Prolegomena*, 83.

[173] Sellars believes that such a move can only be analogical. For him Kantian subjectivity is only *analogically* a speechifier.

[174] Kant, *Prolegomena*, 82.

> But metaphysics leads us towards bounds in the dialectical attempts of pure reason (not undertaken arbitrarily or wantonly, but stimulated thereto by the nature of reason itself). And the transcendental Ideas, as they do not admit of evasion, and are never capable of realization, serve to point out to us actually not only the bounds of the pure use of reason, but also the way to determine them.[175]

> We have [...] indicated the limits of reason with regard to all cognition of mere creations of thought. [That is, speaking in the abstract: reason knows that the understanding cognizes the appearances incompletely, and that the understanding is inadequate to build concepts for cognizing noumena.] Now, since the transcendental ideas have urged us to approach them, and thus have led us, as it were, to the spot where the occupied space (viz., experience) touches the void (that of which we can know nothing, viz. noumena), we can determine the bounds of pure reason. For in all bounds there is something positive (e.g., a surface is the boundary of corporeal space, and is therefore itself a space, a line is a space, which is the boundary of the surface, a point the boundary of the line, but yet always a place in space), whereas limits contain mere negations.[176]

That is, to have a *boundary* – and Kant is certainly convinced he is dealing with a hard-and-fast boundary – you need to have sketched in, in a determinate fashion, a 'Keep Out!' sign, a piece of logical graffiti with the placard-like stolidity of a repellant barrier, as opposed to the invitation of an explorable lapsus. You need to know, according to Kant, *concretely* where you're not supposed to go, and *why*. You need to know this because there is no non-rational intuition (or non-intuition) of the boundary, no simply given veiling-unveiling of the noumenon's unknowableness, which unknowableness is rather inferred: '[T]he setting of a boundary to the field of understanding by something, which is otherwise unknown to it, is still a cognition which belongs to reason even at this standpoint.'[177]

---

[175] Kant, *Prolegomena*, 81.

[176] Kant, *Prolegomena*, 82. Our interposition.

[177] Kant, *Prolegomena*, 87.

But still, this does make one wonder, why the rush to prevent oneself from sallying forth? Of course, we recall that Kant's critical concern and motivation is that of distinguishing legitimate knowledge from illegitimate illusion.

> Reason does not however teach us anything concerning the thing in itself: it only instructs us as regards its own complete and highest use in the field of possible experience. But this is all that can be reasonably desired in the present case, and with which we have cause to be satisfied.[178]

Reason sets boundaries for the understanding as regards when a legitimate cognition of an appearance has taken place – as opposed to an illegitimate travesty of a noumenon – first, by seizing upon the antinomies thrown up by an unbridled use of pure reason, then, secondly, by stamping – as 'Keep Out!' signs – each of these acknowledged and hence auto-transparent contradictions with the name of a 'transcendental Idea of reason'. The transcendental Ideas (of Soul, World, and God) telegraphically label these subreptions, and at the same time commit reason to sharply distinguishing *from* 'concrete-objective' synthetic a priori cognitions, and *as merely practico-normative*, those regulative presuppositions – be they fictions – vis-à-vis noumena such as it cannot go without when trying to render maximally consistent and complete its cognition of the appearances. Its cognition of the appearances constitutes a knowledge possessed not only with logical form but also with a binding-constraining (objective) synthetic *content* – but one that is merely phenomenal.

It is the transcendental Ideas which set the hard boundary between phenomenon and noumenon, by enunciating the contradictorily incoherent presuppositions (which are non-cognitive; that is to say: unfit for judgmental application to a categorially and spatio-temporally given *Gegenstand*), without explicitation and circumscription of which presuppositions cognition will risk to lose itself by swerving into inconsistency. And this type of hard boundary is not the same thing as the soft surpassable 'limits' of the special fields of knowledge of the appearances.

The inevitability of the generation of the transcendental Ideas, a generation stimulated by the craving for knowledge arising from reason's own incompleteness – which desire is precisely what they, as operative but non-actual *fictions* (non-beings) cannot satisfy – leads to the 'infinite task' wherein what Kant concludes to be the eternal non-achievability of successfully realizing what you *should do*, as opposed to what you are 'pathologically' *inclined to do*, leads to the vitiation of *any particular* ethical maxim, and thereby to an increasingly starved repetition of the gesture of voiding or indeterminate negation whereby each and every possible goal is rejected in

[178] Kant, *Prolegomena*, 88.

favour of an interminable reaffirmation of the hollow *form* of duty itself. Such is the non-specificity of the Categorical Imperative, 'Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law.'

Adorno and Horkheimer and Lacan see in this consequence of the gap between phenomenon and noumenon in Kant a neurotic sado-masochism, with the denial of satisfaction itself hypocritically replacing the original demand – which was for progress and synthesis – with a lust for the mortification of satisfaction in enforced dissatisfaction, such as can only end up on the business end of de Sade's spike and in the clunking of the guillotine.

While Hegel is a precursor of this psychoanalytic reading, allow us to put our cards more squarely on the front and centre of the table by stating that, while this reading most likely contains no small truth and indeed demands to be thought through, we believe that acknowledging the pertinence of the irrational traps blindly manufactured by the minimal cog-wheels of reason as Kant understands it does not automatically entail rejecting the 'slippery' autonomy of 'rulish' cognitive-symbolic thought vis-à-vis causal non-thought, and nor does it automatically entail closing the gap between finite-incomplete thought and a supposedly auto-completed ('uncastrated') real, by squashing the two levels onto each other and cancelling out their difference towards either one side or the other. Thus, to anticipate, we respect and salute Deleuze and Guattari's abhorrence of the metaphysical absolutization of the Oedipus complex which they see in post-Heideggerian rejections of the possibility of metaphysics, but will wish to question that aspect of their proposed solution which involves filling in any negative gap or split with ontologized 'production'.

In order to clarify precisely what has gone wrong in Kant's separating distinguishment of (seemingly non-actual) thought from that-which-is-not-thought (but which is actual), it is indispensable to study Hegel's tooth-and-claw attack on Kant's conception of the 'boundary'. This preparation will allow us to grasp the stakes of Hegel's crucial distinction between 'good' and 'bad' infinities, as well as the complications Badiou diagnoses when Hegel comes to cash out this distinction at the level of *quantity*.

2. *The paradoxical* is-ought *relation in Hegel*

In the *Logic* Hegel launches his attack with a certain modicum of sarcasm as well as some exasperated hand-wringing. On Hegel's reading Kant's hardening of the 'boundary' into an unsurpassable absolute barrier itself nonsensically contradicts its own presuppositions. For Hegel, the boundary is meaningless as a boundary other than in relation to the *non-bounded* Other of the bounded thing of which we are speaking. This observation is part and parcel of a central principle at work in the speculative dialectic, namely that what needs to be kicked against and dislodged is the assumption that *incompleteness* implies a hard-and-fast, permanent stopping-perimeter. More detail on this point will be given in the next chapter, but here Hegel's own opening salvo is salty

and limpid enough to be quoted at length. Furthermore, it displays the paradoxicality of the manner in which he speaks of 'the *ought*' in a way that is of great interest for our investigation.

> *[M]uch* is commonly made of the restrictions of thought, of reason, and so forth, and the claim is made that it is *impossible* to transcend such restrictions. What is lost track of in this claim is that something is already transcended by the very fact of being determined as a restriction. For a determinateness, a limit, is determined as a restriction only in opposition to its other in general, that is, in opposition to *that which is without its restriction*; the other of a restriction is precisely the *beyond* with respect to it. Stone, metal, do not transcend their restriction, for the simple reason that the restriction is not a restriction *for them*. [...] Just because thought *ought* to be something higher than actuality, just because it *ought* to dwell in higher regions remote from it, and therefore be itself determined as an *ought*, it fails on the one hand to advance to the concept [*Begriffe* – A. V. Miller translates this as 'Notion'], and on the other hand it manages to be equally untrue both in its relation to actuality and to the concept [*Begriff* – Notion]. – Because a stone does not think, does not even feel, its determinateness is not a restriction *for it*, that is, it is not in it a negation for the sensation, the representation, the thought, and so on, which it does not have. But the stone too is as something distinguished in its determination or its in-itself and existence, and to this extent it too transcends its restriction; the concept which the stone is in itself contains the identity with its other. If it is a base receptive to acids then it is oxidizable, neutralizable, and so on. In the process of oxidization, neutralization, and so on, its restriction to being only a base is sublated; it transcends it, and similarly the acid overcomes its restriction of being an acid, and in the acid just as in the caustic base the *ought*, *the imperative* to transcend their restriction, is so strong that it is only with violence that they can be kept fixed as acid and caustic base [...].[179]

> The plant transcends the restriction of being a seed, similarly, of being blossom, fruit, leaf; the seed becomes the developed plant, the blossom fades, and so forth. In the grip of hunger, thirst, and so forth, the sentient creature is the impulse to transcend this restriction, and it does transcend it. It feels *pain*, and to feel pain is the privilege of sentient nature. Pain is a negation within the sentient's self, and this negation is determined *as a restriction* in the sentient's feeling just because the sentient has a feeling of its *self*, and this self is the totality that transcends the determinateness of the negation. If the sentient did not

[179] Hegel, *Logic*, 105-106. Translation modified with reference to the versions by A. V. Miller and Bernard Bourgeois and to the German.

> transcend it, it would not feel it as negation and would have no pain. – But it is reason, thought, which is supposed not to be able to transcend this restriction: reason, which is the *universal*, which is for itself the beyond of particularity *as such*, that is, of *all* particularity, is only the transcendence of restriction.[180]

On the face of it, 'the ought' is not the way things *are* – say this is squalid and unjust and compulsive, or otherwise – but is the way certain philosophers *think* that things *should be* – be this haughty or masochistically unspecific or otherwise. However, surprisingly, it turns out that for Hegel the ought *is* legitimate… *but only in the field of finitude*, where error and 'fictional' (a clumsy word, soon to be upgraded) non-actuality hold a good deal of sway. But at the same time, *in non-finite actuality* – against Kant and Fichte – 'reason and law' (not so shoddily) *are*, and we will have to try to grasp how for Hegel, from the perspective of the 'good infinity', they are thus able to sublate the *ought.* We will aim by the end of this study to grasp what 'non-finite actuality' might mean in Hegel if he is to be salvaged from a furtive relapse into theology.

> Duty is an *ought* directed against the particular will, against self-seeking desire and arbitrary interest; it is the ought held up before a will capable of isolating itself from the truth because of its instability. Those who hold the ought of morality so high as to believe that, by not recognizing it as the ultimate truth, morality itself would be destroyed; the brokers of reason whose understanding takes unceasing satisfaction in being able to confront everything that there is with an ought and consequently a would-be superior knowledge – who therefore are all the more resistant to being robbed of the ought – these do not see that, as regards the finitude of their sphere, the ought receives full recognition. – But in the actual order of things, reason and law are not in such a sad state of affairs that they only *ought* to be (only the abstraction of the in-itself stays at this); equally, the ought does not perpetuate itself nor, which is the same, is finitude absolute. The philosophy of Kant and Fichte holds out the *ought* as the resolution of the contradictions of reason – though it is rather only a standpoint that remains fixed in finitude and therefore in contradiction.[181]

It looks like Hegel is saying that, insofar as 'reason and law' *are*, they are not identical to the ought, which *is not*, or somehow *is only as* mired in the brittle illusions of an isolated finitude: as non-being. That 'reason and law' be conceived as *being* brings to mind the famous

[180] Hegel, *Logic*, 106-107. Translation modified.

[181] Hegel, *Logic*, 107-8.

mission statement whereby Hegel aims to conceptualize 'substance becoming subject'. But how exactly is this going to be cashed out regarding the *ought*?

The passages we have looked at in this chapter suggest that for Hegel *that which is* ultimately twists and squashes *that which is not* but merely *ought* to be. It is tempting to surmise that for him the Act is what truly *is*. This act *might* be cast as the act of making a move within the space of reasons; of drawing the consequences of that move; of the driven, compulsive necessity of *doing*; or ultimately – for Sellars and for what Hegel arguably retains from Spinoza – of certain assemblages of causal patterning. The Act would then be what posits of the norm and also what surpassingly revises (destroys) the norm.

However, the trouble with this interpretation would be that it is not clear – for reasons to be reviewed in the next chapter – why it would make sense to call any Act or action *infinite*. The self-replenishing goldmine looms worryingly. If the infinite could have nothing upon which to apply its torsion without the finite, is there not a case that conversely the finite too exerts a torsion upon the infinite? Could torsion *per se* be effectuated at all without that '*transcending* ['of restriction'] which is itself only *finite*'[182] that is operated specifically by the ought? These questions are intended as anticipatory previews to be decrypted in what follows, but already it seems clear that one is justified in asking: Could one even speak of (that is, concretize-in-thought) the infinite – that which most truly *is* – at all if it were not for the nullifying gap of what *should be* but *isn't*: the lapsus of refusing what already *is* and the concomitant swerved-askance error-façade-fiction of non-being that is the *ought*? These questions are lodged in the schism between Badiou and Hegel, and elucidating them will require that we review the shape of some of the most minimal building blocks wrought by Hegel in his study of pure thought through pure thought, near the beginning of the *Logic*.

Among the results of this elucidation will be the findings that while Hegel does not view what *is* as synonymous exclusively with positivity (with the Positive) nor what *is not* as exclusively synonymous with the Negative, he also does not view the infinite as *exclusive* of the finite, nor the finite as *exclusive* of the infinite. Furthermore, in an important disagreement with Spinoza, he does not view the infinite as a *substance*.

[182] Hegel, *Logic*, 107. Our interposition rearranging Hegel's own text.

Chapter 6
The Non-Identity of Identity:
Hegel, Badiou, and the Quantitative Infinity

0. *The 'good' and 'bad' infinities*

Do the snares that are errors and mistakes harbour the slightest clue as to how they might be surpassed, or are they mere pieces of rubbish destined to be disposed of entirely?

This question requires that we formulate precisely what we mean by 'surpass'. The word 'surpass' as used in the just-asked question implies that error might lend itself to becoming a springboard. Conversely, she who holds that mistakes have scant lessons to impart will find little interest in launching herself from such a trampoline. Speaking of 'error' at all may well lose its meaning. In this chapter it will be argued, in three stages, that the response Hegel proposes to our question – and the critique of his response offered by Alain Badiou – allow us to interrogate the manner in which the concept of *infinity* may be related to that of chance or randomness, and to those of identity and non-identity. A few – at first sight incongruous – consequences will be drawn from this, touching upon the domains of chemistry and the critique of political economy. First of all, we will present a prefatory summary of the three steps constituting the chapter.

The question we have asked in opening the chapter finds itself tangled up in the stakes of a distinction made by Hegel between two types of infinity: 'good' and 'bad'. This distinction can be deployed in an array of different contexts. We shall, in the first part of this chapter (part I), attempt a reading of what Hegel himself says about it, shortly after the opening of the first Book, that Book dealing with 'being', of his *Science of Logic*, published in 1812 and reworked between 1827 and 1831. Here Hegel sketches the pure dialectical schemas of the two infinities, stripped of specific objects, articulating them not only with 'being', but also with 'non-being'. At first glance the project undertaken by Hegel, which kicked off with 'pure being', seems to consist in deducing from the latter, in the third book of the treatise, a limpid 'concept of the concept', traversing the *Doctrine of Essence* in the middle on the way. This interpretation is no doubt accurate. However, that the deduction could or should be taken to possess the character of a linear unfurling is far from self-evident. In any case, it is certainly necessary to put Kantian cognitive *opacity* centrestage if we want to be able to ask the question of error without falling into the naïve presupposition that representation makes a word we enunciate correspond to an object that would be simply given in experience *independently* of the very operations of representation. A second question therefore imposes itself, in the aim of circumscribing the intelligibility of the first. Does it still make sense to maintain that truth can be extracted from our mistakes – from the snares of mere deceitful appearance – once we refuse to believe that our fragile inkling of what *seems* to be the case could *correspond* verificationally to any object which would distinguish itself from this frail inkling while also being given in experience? To clear a path for a response to this

question, we will study, in the second part of the chapter (part II), a critical commentary upon the relevant passages of the *Logic* undertaken by Badiou in his 1988 book *Being and Event*.

What unites Hegel and Badiou is the conviction that, in no matter what circumstance, in order to overcome the threat of a sterile repetition, one must pass from the finite – that of the point on which one is stuck at the beginning – to the infinite. Nevertheless, Badiou attacks Hegel's figuration of the infinite as that which 'relates itself to itself', a circular conception which calls to mind the antique motif of the snake swallowing its own tail, and affirms against this that what we are dealing with as regards the 'infinite' is, in the first instance, simply a word by which we designate a property remaining to be demonstrated and which cannot be considered to be already secured and in the bag from the get-go. Badiou insists upon a sharp discontinuity in the procedure whereby (meta-)ontological thought construes a coherent idea of a structuration of being such that one may legitimately christen it 'infinite'. In order to assure himself of the reinsertion of this act of nomination into the integrality of the model through which the act understands the domain in which it rolls itself out[183], he exacts a *decision*, deprived of any easily pinpointable stimulus (or rather, of any pinpointable stimulus at all). The decision he demands is the decision to move from what is discernable and classifiable – and hence finite – to what isn't.

Hegel, contrary to Badiou, lets inconsistency and contradiction pour into the inner sanctum of 'being'. He maintains that the finite, paradoxically, *is not* – or, *not really* – and that, in his jargon, qua 'self-annulling and self-sublating', this finite is nothing other than the inverse of the infinite. Thus, a difference between *being* and *non-being* traverses any and all finite things. This negativity allows us to correct or revise what the thing seems to us to be, by seizing upon those clues furnished by its explicitly manifest determinations which hint at the relations of dependence and incompatibility held by these determinations with other *non*-given predicates. But Badiou is suspicious of the utilization of these determinate crumbs. For him it is the (complicatedly) non-qualitative capacity accruing to *mathematics* which allows it to schematize indiscernibility and undecidability which alone permits the separative *rupture* fit to detach itself from the finite, and, in the same wrenching manoeuvre, to open onto the exploration of infinity.

Moreover, Badiou will – in *Being and Event*, and since then – restrain the conceivable modality of the fecund surpassing strictly to the *contingent*. But Hegelian negativity always sooner or later mixes itself up with determinate-determined *categorial* 'positivities'. In consequence Badiou interprets it, in a severely critical fashion, as a *guarantee* of the success of cognitive progress, which guarantee has been shipped on board in a clandestine manner and in lack of any possible justification. He believes that Hegel grasps surpassing per se as a necessary, organic, and *inevitable* flowering, wherein each instance would be smugly presumed to be

[183] A *mathematical* model – which we will see is importantly *not* actually a 'model'… but for now this is an acceptable heuristic placeholder.

comfortably rooted in a point-of-departure amongst what is given and discernible on the level of the finite. Badiou finds this rebarbative. That it be denied that the desired surpassing *might forever fail to happen* will strike him as complaisant, if not reactionary. Because Hegel does not dare risk an interventional leap – a blind dice-throw – but rather installs himself in a *continuity* with the given finite qualitatively individuated determinations, he is doomed merely to reiterate, in the style of a parrot, the normative-epistemic habits which he has had imposed upon him by the regime of discernibility and classification which is, as it happens, and in all banality, currently in force. He will reshuffle some familiar elements into varying *bricolages*, in service of modestly utilitarian ends (or worse), but he won't manage to *create* the unconditional novelty he so wishes to attain.

However, it seems to us that, in giving this reading, Badiou skims too quickly over the question of errors concerning *a posteriori* knowledge. While we believe he is right to – obstinately, and with finesse – affirm that *indifference* towards finitude can and should be achieved through *decisions*, we will argue that, in *Being and Event* and its sequel, his rejection of the conceptual resources offered by Hegel is a bit hasty. With regard to the question of error and truth in the *a posteriori*, we shall without further ado, and in order to set up the work to be undertaken in the main body of the chapter, take a look at an example given by Badiou in the just-mentioned sequel, *Logics of Worlds*. We are invited to consider the appearance of the autumnal red of a vine as it loses the green which it sported during the summer. For Hegel, the *error* here would consist in believing this change to be factitious – *without necessity*. On the contrary, there are rules, that are non-manifest, which we have to postulate in order to understand the cause of this variation in colour: chiefly, the chemical laws which determine the pigmentation of the foliage as a function of temperature and sunlight. This is a 'determinate negation', and through it '[t]he concrete existing world tranquilly raises itself to a kingdom of laws'[184]. Yet Badiou refuses this negation, because it depends on a continuity with the given:

> No, the phenomenal world does not 'raise itself' to any kingdom whatsoever, its 'varied being-there' has no separate subsistence which would amount to its negative effectuation. Existence stems solely from the contingent logic of a world which nothing sublates, and in which [...] negation appears as pure exteriority.[185]

[184] Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (*Book Two: The Doctrine of Essence*), trans. George di Giovanni, Cambridge: CUP, 2010, 443.

[185] Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event, 2*, trans. Alberto Toscano, London/NY: Bloomsbury, 2009, 152. Translation modified.

As we will see in what follows, Badiou thereby deprives himself of any recourse to what he calls 'interior negativity': the power of knowing supposed by Hegel in his explanation of the functioning of qualitatively individuating determination in general. Notably, the bone of contention will be the role of interior negativity in the annulment of the im-mediate inkling of what mathematizable quantity *is*, and in the conservation of this superficial idea upon a more elevated plane of knowing: its 'sublation' (*Aufhebung*). What provokes Badiou's most pronounced sardonic incredulity is that Hegel express *this* sublation in particular *as itself an effectuation of the true infinity*. Hegel proposes that, through the contested interiorizing – relational – negativity, quantity is put in relation with its own essence, showing its *determinate difference* with regard to that-which-is-not-quantity: quality. Badiou does not accept this. According to him, negativity can only be purely 'exterior', non-qualitative, non-dialectical, and non-relational.

Such an exteriority is stipulated by Badiou *ontologically*, and the Zermelo-Fraenkel axiomatization of set theory is, with considerable flair, deductively stapled and hammered into this part of philosophical discourse (into ontology), in such a way as to render up a quasi-mathematical consistency allowing for the passage indifferently across the line of separation between finitude and infinity. In an apparent paradox, this exteriority thus turns out to be entirely *positive*. Indeed, here we hit upon the problematic kernel of the debate. In so far as they bear upon the pronouncements somewhat haughtily dispensed by Hegel in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* contrasting the supposedly 'mechanical' indifference of mathematics with the conceptually instructive qualitative difference which (he here intimates that) it does not touch, Badiou's scruples – indeed, his refutations (or post-Cantorian *updates*) – are far-reaching. But our conclusion here, which will be attained in the third part of the chapter (part III) through consultation of Gérard Lebrun's rival interpretation of Hegel, will be that Badiou's 1988 criticisms are not entirely justified. What is more, there are reasons why we may want to put into question the role Badiou attributes to *consistency* in *Being and Event*. These reasons concern the manner of its stipulation and the fact that it is treated as a synonym of 'being'. In this connection, in order to rid himself – with a ferocity which is certainly admirable – of the transparency and false evidence of the given, Badiou aligns *negativity* with *indifference*, identifying them with each other, such that negativity finds itself neutralized, and such that everything is rendered ontologically *positive*. But if positivity remains – in spite of Badiou's ingenuity – another name for the self-identical, then its proposal as an *ontological* principle is put in doubt. For it should not be ignored that, according to Hegel, it is not obligatory to *separate* being and non-being: Hegel does not *oppose* them to each other. Coming back to the example of the vine, we shall ponder if the major stake here isn't in fact the question of the intelligibility of the *apparently fortuitously random*. It seems to us that this stake is not without connection to another error which,

in a neoliberal context, may cause one to believe that freedom emanates itself out of itself in the locus of the isolated individual, supposed to be surrounded by an unintelligibly chaotic aleatory ocean: a point we aim to make in concluding our comparison of the strategies of Hegel and Badiou.

I.

1. *Hegel: the qualitative 'something'*

In the *Logic,* Hegel's mission is for thinking to think itself in purification of any sensible object that would be supposed to be given to it while at the same time being exterior to it. This gutting is intended to bring about a state of affairs wherein the sole object scrutinized by conceptual discourse is conceptual discourse itself. The exposition of the two infinities begins then with the qualitative 'something'. This is the *form* presupposed by any conception of what qualitative-categorial determinacy *is*. *Determinacy* is fundamentally what distinguishes a specific 'what' or *quidditas* from a non-specified indeterminate nothing. Hegel's thesis, in a nutshell, is going to be that the something necessarily passes beyond its own boundary by annulling in itself the mark of the void which is its Other. We will start by tracing how this thesis is reached, such as to make some sense out of the following rather gnomic-sounding gloss, with which slogan we wish to encapsulate the key insight of the development: the negativity in the something is that of what it is not. In fact, the something is indeed at the outset determined in a negative manner by its exterior Other, that which is not identical to it, or what it is not.

> Something is therefore immediate, self-referring existence and at first it has a limit with respect to another; limit is the non-being of the Other, not of the something itself; in limit, something marks the boundary of its Other.[186]

'*[T]his something is what it is by virtue of it* [its limit], has *its quality in it*.'[187] But, without an affirmative going-beyond, allowing the something to attain its positive relation-to-self, this 'first negation' is merely provisional, because unilateral and unconsummated. The non-being of the Other which is inscribed within the heart of the something – the something at this stage being

[186] Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (*Book One: The Doctrine of Being*), trans. George di Giovanni, Cambridge: CUP, 2010, 98. Henceforth *SLB*. We have followed Bernard Bourgeois in modifying Giovanni's translation by capitalizing the 'Other', in order to highlight the irreducible role played by the interiorization of exteriority, which we hereby launch ourselves into trying to illustrate.

[187] Hegel, *SLB*, 99.

nothing other than this very labelling – is the non-being of a nondescript non-identical, itself deprived of determination, which is therefore nothing other than a fuzzily posited exterior void. The limit is rather precisely a *boundary*: A is not non-A. But non-A *is nothing*. 'Yet the thing *is*.'[188] Salt *is* savoury, rather than sweet; Jupiter *is* gaseous, rather than rocky. Therefore, what will be needed is the 'negation of the negation', 'the crossing of non-being'[189] which is the going-beyond of the boundary: A *is the negation* of non-A. From this springs a definition: 'The something, posited with its immanent limit as the contradiction of itself by virtue of which it is directed and driven out and beyond itself, is the *finite*.'[190] Curiously, Hegel calls this characteristic of the something, that of being split-apart-from-itself, its '*ought*'[191].

How are we to understand this? Let us keep in mind that, while it may well be the case that the coincidence of subject with object, and thereby of thought with being, was, as far as Hegel is concerned, attained at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, furnishing the point of departure for the *Logic*, we are nonetheless still obliged to constantly traverse and re-traverse the *concepts* which line themselves up in naïve immediacy under the flag of 'being'. The intention is to traverse and retraverse them in order to lift off and dissipate the merely superficial contradictions accruing to them, so as to be able to knock up against their essential contradictions. We thereby learn how 'being' *must* determine itself such as to allow conceptualization to start happening in the first place. And let's remember, in this connection, that Kant had criticized – as 'rhapsodic' – any attempt at cataloguing the properties constitutive of any system whatsoever omitting to deduce its terms from a necessary principle.[192] For Kant, in want of such a deduction we will find ourselves struggling and failing to complete the list in a systematic fashion. Now, Hegel does not want to dodge this moment of uncertainty but rather to usher it into the heart of the labour of the concept, and – in a certain way – into the heart of being itself. Seeing as Hegel views negativity to be non-bypassable, it is possible here to offer a minimally 'metaphysical' reading: deceitful appearance – semblance or seeming *(Schein)* – is objective even before subjectivity (self-

[188] Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, London/NY: Continuum, 2006 [1988], 163. Henceforth *BE*.

[189] *Ibid*.

[190] Hegel, *SLB*, 101.

[191] *Ibid.*, 104.

[192] For example, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* at A81/B106.

consciousness) arrives on the scene.[193] And a *finite* thing is necessarily always crumbling, falling apart, and disappearing, or *changing*, which is to say: being what it *ought not to be*, and such that it *ought to be* something else. In any case, it is clear that, if we stick stringently to the Hegelian definition of a thing which is finite, and *only* finite, this thing will contradict itself so profoundly that it cannot but *pass away* and perish: 'the being as such of finite things is to have the germ of this transgression in their in-itselfness: the hour of their birth is the hour of their death.'[194]

2. *The negation of the negation*

'Sweet' is certainly not the same thing as 'rocky', but, this being said, the two terms only enter into a relation of negation each with the other which is tenuous, and lacking interest.

> The negative judgement is not, therefore, total negation [...] When it is said that, for instance, the rose is *not* red, only the *determinateness* of the predicate is thereby denied and thus separated from the universality which equally attaches to it; the universal sphere, *color*, is retained; if the rose is not red, it is nonetheless assumed that it has a color, though another color. From the side of this universal sphere, the judgement is still positive.[195]

The sphere, or spheres, of the universal is or are thus a condition of effectivity of the quintessence of the 'negation of the negation', *determinate negation*. Gérard Lebrun fleshes this out:

> It is not true that, in relation to A, *all the others* are only anonymous and equivalent non-As; it is not true that the 'subject' differs from the 'object' in the same way that it differs from a 'sheet of paper', nor

[193] Cf. Hegel's section on 'Shine' – that is, 'appearance' or 'manifestation', as in 'seeming' or 'semblance': *Shein* in German (Giovanni chooses the translation 'shine' with the aim of retaining the German term's connotation of light) – in *The Science of Logic* (*Book Two: The Doctrine of Essence*), 343-345.

[194] Hegel, *SLB*, 101. Giovanni's 'transgression' here picks up on the meaning of 'offence' accruing to the German *Vergehen*, which also carries the meaning 'passage of time'.

[195] Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (*Volume Two: The Science of Subjective Logic or The Doctrine of the Concept*), trans. George di Giovanni, 565.

> that 'identity' is separated from 'difference' just like from any other concept.[196]

It is impossible that the properties of things determine themselves *only* by mutually limiting each other, *only* by excluding each other in the midst of an element which is *indifferent*. The infinite *cannot* be an already-given substantial totality, like some sort of cake, expressed by a negative determination which would be *purely* differential-oppositional.

If such were the case, there would be no possible means of interrogating the facticity of those categories which are occurrent. It is true that cyan and turquoise, on one level of analysis, distinguish themselves each from the other mutually, reflexively. However, the 'zoom in' on the chromatic spectrum has to halt somewhere: why here, like this? Moreover, 'colour' is a *determinable*, a genre which discerns its species, the tones or shades. So then, why are certain determinables real and effective and others not? The 'spin' of a quark is a determinable which was in no way empirically given before being laboriously constructed. 'Money' and – let's say – the 'exchange rate of Turkish lira into US dollars' are determinables, but cannot be deduced from any natural necessity. We can see that the 'second negation', the negation of the negation, is intimately tied up with *effectivity* – contrasted with mere abstract possibility – also, and *especially*, when this effectivity appears fortuitous. This in part accounts for why Hegel stays close to Fichte on some issues, and why he distances himself from him on others. He remains loyal to the influence of Fichte in affirming that we cannot accept a facticity as Absolute except after having submitted it to our own negating and constructive conceptual activity. But he quails at the oppositive exclusion through which, starting from a presupposed independence, the 'I' *posits itself as* determined by the 'Non-I', thereby excluding the Non-I from itself, only to ineluctably end up determining this Non-I as a mere(ly) 'opposed' instance deprived of positive content.

3. *The 'bad' qualitative infinity*

We saw that the finite thing, once split asunder, found itself in a space which was indeterminately empty. However, rather than totally losing itself here, it remains discernible, even though it is no longer a something but rather a *nothing*. The something disintegrates, and yet remains marked by the stamp of the contradiction which it is, even in this empty Other. This fact of being divided between non-being and being is nothing other than 'the same diremption of *in-itselfness* and *determinateness* as is restriction'[197]. The stamp-of-nothing – in a surprising plot-

[196] Gérard Lebrun, *La Patience du concept. Essai sur le discours hégélien*, Paris: Gallimard, 1972, 279.

[197] Hegel, *SLB*, p. 108. Here 'restriction' means the same thing as 'boundary': both words translate *Schranke*.

twist – now finds itself once again hemmed in by a boundary, through the very fact of no longer being, and precisely *not* being, a finite something. But this means that a finite something has reconstituted itself. We therefore come back to the point of departure: the something is once again expulsed from itself, and this roundabout continues in a boring repetition. What we are dealing with is an *infinite series of repetitions*, which Hegel names the false or 'bad' infinity. As Badiou remarks, this is an incessant, automatist going-beyond, which reproduces monotonously again and again another 'still-more', yet another *quidditas* of which the determinacy does not liberate itself from that of its neighbour.[198] The series cannot manage to 'gather itself together' through its own wherewithal, failing to raise itself up to a phase-shift or leap towards the realization of its own infinite character.

The Other which, at the beginning, had determined the something has thus revealed itself to be *the indeterminate void where the finite repeats itself*. Indeed, here the whole problem, according to Hegel, boils down to the fact that the infinite has from the get-go been conceptualized tacitly precisely as being situated *beyond determinacy-as-such,* that is, as *beyond determinacy taken in aggregate. This* infinity, thus conceptualized, reveals itself for this reason to be paradoxically enclosed or fenced in (bounded) by the determinacy-en-bloc which it confronts *over against* itself, and thus suffers the ignominy of being *rendered finite*. What's happening here is, so to speak, the 'stuttering' of the finite, which tears itself apart and throws itself outside itself, only to find itself there again. What we have is a carrousel in which the finite *ought to be* infinite, but is not really, and where the (false) infinite also *ought to be* infinite, but, hemmed in, *contradicts itself* and collapses towards determinacy, the Other from which it has been (falsely) isolated. This is, then, a *finite infinite* which, in a botched dialectic, tumbles into a reification in the shape of an existent thing.

In Hegel's eyes, such a sad state of affairs can be overcome only by abandoning that error of the *understanding* which consists in excluding the infinite from the finite, *beyond* it. This perspective, contrary to that of *speculative reason*, freezes itself in a reflection exterior to the things-in-themselves, and tends to recoil when faced with contradictions. It is in this way that, further downstream, the door is left open to the absolutization and substantialization of the reified infinite, such that the entire domain of finite particularity cannot but be swallowed up by it. In the 'philosophy of Identity' elaborated in Schellingianism, the coincidence of knowing and known is taken to be graspable in the pre-intentional aesthetic immediacy of the work of art. But for Hegel this adds up to effacing all distinctions in the obscurity of indifferentiation, allowing anything at

[198] Badiou*, BE*, 163.

all to be put on a pedestal as Absolute: banal strategies as much as productive ones, passively received facticities as much as facticities which are products.

4. *The 'good' qualitative infinity*

By getting rid of the understanding's presupposition that there *must* be an oppositional difference between finite and infinite, we gain the possibility of conceiving of them as mutually folded into each other. Each needs to be injected into the other, in a chiasm. The incessant going-beyond must itself be gone beyond, by *transcending the transcending*.[199]

> [E]ach is itself this unity, and this only as a *sublating* of itself in which neither would have an advantage over the other in in-itselfness and affirmative existence. As has earlier been shown, finitude is only as a transcending of itself; it is therefore within it that the infinite, the other of itself, is contained. Similarly, the infinite is only as the transcending of the finite; it therefore contains its other essentially, and it is thus within it that it is the other of itself. The finite is not sublated by the infinite as by a power present outside it; its infinity consists rather in sublating itself.[200]

The conception of the infinite as *exterior void* – and as, at the same time, supra-substance – was incoherent. Hegel's strategy thus consists, so to speak, in voiding the void-Other, in deflating it. The non-being, or non-thing (in German one might say the *Unding*), which is the void-Other, to begin with paradoxically reified as a hyper-thing which 'stabbed' and transfixed the finite something from a vantage outside the thing, is to be definitively decongested from it and cleared out. For Hegel, the true infinity *is only* insofar as finite incompleteness relates itself to itself by annulling and conserving itself in a new finite incompleteness.[201] Thus the effective infinity is *nothing other* than the auto-surpassing of the finite, which sublates itself.

---

[199] Cf. Hegel, *SLB*, 113.

[200] Hegel, *SLB*, 116.

[201] To clarify, this statement applies fully only to finite *being*; it has to be added that, on the level of the *concept*, completeness and completion or completability are essential aspects of the Hegelien absolute – which, however, through a Marxian twist which we will later broach, neither guarantees freedom nor blots out epistemic-*geistig* finitude. But nonetheless, in my understanding, the fact that the Hegelian Absolute Concept (or Notion) is *complete*, in that it consists in an equilibrated, fully self-relating or self-negating negativity, in the shape of logically irreversible contradictions and unities-in-opposition, does not rule out that it can be said to be *at the same time* finite. It seems to us that the interest of reading Hegel on this topic

As Badiou had earlier suggested, making a borrowing from Lacan, the best topological model for this type of dialectical relation is the Moebius strip.[202] This is a flat band or ribbon with two surfaces, recto and verso, which join each other where the ends of the band meet in a circle, but with a twist such that recto runs into verso and *vice versa*. Infinity is the *torsion* by which the finite annuls and remakes itself. It is necessary that the void-Other 'beyond' sublate itself in order to attain the true infinity, such that the *finite* become 'for-itself' – auto-affirming – by making itself into the means through which this '*negation* of the beyond'[203] is effectuated. This is as much as to say that what still persists, having arrived at this point now, of *simply exterior* exteriority – illusorily already-given in pseudo-metaphysical separation and ostentatiously flaunting an alterity pretending to a crown of legislative power – finds itself reduced by the negation of the negation – as we'll see presently in more detail – to an inert Zero.

5. *Repetitional of repetition or self-relating negativity?*

In *Being and Event*, it is only grudgingly that Badiou hereupon allows himself to admire the immediately foregoing, 'Hegel's stroke of genius'[204]. According to his interpretation, the operation through which Hegel recuperates the stammer of the bad repetition, turning it into a good infinity, is carried out precisely through the *repetition* itself. By explicitly seizing upon and thematizing the repetition, on Badiou's account Hegel succeeds in extracting from the automatism its own capacity to repeat itself: its *effectivity* as such, 'the repetitional of repetition, as other of the void'[205]. On Badiou's reading, Hegel's void here has two functions simultaneously:

---

resides precisely in the de-theologization and de-substantialization of the finite, just as much as of the infinite, on offer in the proposal that these terms are only properly mediated once one grasps that they refer to the *self-relation through self-sublation* of each in the other, and in itself, taking place through a *movement* of relating-self-to-self. What is very intriguing here – we claim – is the potential on offer for rendering the infinite and the finite both de-mystified and unglamorous. We will momentarily study Badiou's 1988 disagreement with our claim.

[202] Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels, London/NY: Continuum, 2009 [1982], 35-36; Badiou, Bellassen and Mossot, *The Rational Kernel of the Hegelian Dialectic*, ed. and trans. Tzuchien Tho, Melbourne: re.press, 2011 [1978], 58.

[203] Hegel, *SLB*, 116.

[204] Badiou, *BE*, p. 165.

[205] *Ibid.*

(a.) Firstly – the function of which Badiou approves: that of an exterior place crossed out and ditched in non-relation by the repetition. Through the elucidation of the inert non-determinant neutrality of its place of inscription, the operativity of the brute repetition relates itself to itself as such, and affirms itself as autonomous. In other words, Badiou attributes to Hegel a *deductive conceptualization* of the repetition in its purity *as repetition*. It is the negativity which traverses the qualitative something – rather than a negativity originating anywhere else – which allows its mechanical tic to be *conceived* through rational, non-mechanical inferences: there is no 'void' without an instance which distinguishes itself from it (from that void), and the dialectic of the qualitative something has shown that the minimal instance is going to be repetitive; hence the exterior void-place exists thanks only to the repetition, just as the repetition exists thanks only to the exterior void-place. By demonstrating that the void is nothing other than the 'blank' where the brute repetition effectuates itself in an independent manner, Hegel refutes the hypothesis that the determinacy of the finite was passively granted to it from the exterior. In the skeletal perspective proper to the *Doctrine of Being*, *every* determinacy more qualitatively rich than brute repetition is a complexification of it (the bad infinity harbours the good). The neutralization of the void here is therefore very important. George Bataille had suggested that there could be such a thing as an 'unemployed negativity' which would hit us with a laziness coming from the outside of mediation itself, or from its exhaustion, such that we would be confronted by it 'as if by a wall'[206]. Badiou on the contrary maintains that exterior negativity cannot resemble a wall, because it is *nothing*. If one agrees with Badiou on this point – as we propose one should – it is thus that the crown of simple exteriority will fall to clatter on the ground.[207]

(b.) The second function in Badiou's account of the Hegelian void – which sees his commentary veering into a harsh criticism – is that of a hyperabundant virtuality, supposedly presupposed by Hegel, wherein would be concentrated in 'pure presence'[208] the given-non-given plenitude of everything that is absent. Badiou agrees with Hegel about deflating the exterior Other and about giving the name 'void' to the infinite, since Badiou is ready to validate that this name

[206] Georges Bataille, 'Letter to X, Lecturer on Hegel', in eds. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, *The Bataille Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, 296-300, 296, 298. The addressee X was Alexandre Kojève.

[207] On a different level, the same shape is pertinent to Hegel's belief that spirit is that which desires itself, and to Feuerbach's claim that the powers we predicate of God are really estrangements of the predicates of our own activity.

[208] Badiou, *BE*, 166.

indicates the 'trans-finite polarity'[209] of the bad alternance. However, for Badiou during this period of his philosophical trajectory 'virtuality' is a dirty word, in line with his suspicion that the term supposes, without justification, a guarantee of successful creativity.[210] He believes then that during Hegel's development the void ends up being *re-inflated*, once again impregnated with the surreptitiously postulated quasi-metaphysical productivity of which the *refutation* had been its task across its first function.

However, regarding this second function, it seems to us that what we are dealing with is a variant of a widespread caricature of Hegel. In our eyes, the evidence for it, at least in this context, is slim. That Badiou considers the Hegelian for-itself, which relates-itself-to-itself and sublates itself, to be synonymous with 'subjective virtuality', or 'contraction in virtuality', 'generative' and 'intrinsic', and – mobilizing Heidegger and Derrida – as a cypher for 'presence'[211], allows him to hastily undergird a double portrait of Hegel not only as a pious optimist, but also as a crafty acrobat. Badiou's treatment of the destiny of the Other-void through the first function he attributes to it is penetrating, if not indispensable. But it would be difficult to recognize, in the first Book of the *Logic*, a sly theologian who wants to 'resolve the problem' of the bad infinity at all costs 'without undoing the dialectical continuity'[212].

The exterior void remains disarmed and demilitarized, and also non-fecund. If infinity is, 'in itself, the Other of itself', and 'as the Other of the void being-other, qua negation of the negation, return to self and self-relation'[213] – 'for-itself' –, I would argue that this is in no way thanks to the insertion by sleight of hand of any reassuring virtuality or subjectivity. On the contrary, to desubstantialize the infinite as tenaciously as does Hegel in these parts of the *Logic*

---

[209] Badiou*, BE*, 167.

[210] 'I uphold that the forms of the multiple are […] always actual and that the virtual does not exist' (Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000 [1997], 45.).

[211] Badiou*, BE*, 163, 166, 167.

[212] Badiou*, BE*, 165.

[213] Unfortunately, neither Giovanni nor A. V. Miller include in their editions of the *Logic* these helpfully encapsulating phrases from the 1812 version of the *Doctrine of Being*, phrases from which Badiou takes an amalgam as an epigraph to his commentary. We have therefore translated them from the French edition: Hegel, *Science de la logique. Livre premier – L'être. Textes de 1812 et 1832*, trans. Bernard Bourgeois, Paris: Vrin, 2015, 208.

is to render it *unhelpful, if not entirely useless*, precisely by removing from it any possibility of showing us *how* to surpass this or that constraint. The infinite is no longer a giver of specific criteria of success (nor of failure). If the abstract, separated Other cannot oblige the 'something' to affirm itself in order to go beyond itself, then it would appear that the something is going to have to do this itself. And for Hegel, this is possible only because being itself shows itself to be made out of non-being, in the form of a *negativity which negates itself*. He says regarding the mutual sublation of the finite and the infinite that

> This sublating is not [...] alteration or otherness in general, not the sublating of *something*. That into which the finite is sublated is the infinite as the negating of finitude. But the latter has long since been only existence, determined as a *non-being*. It is only the *negation*, therefore, that in the negation sublates itself. Thus infinity is determined on its side as the negative of the finite and thereby of determinateness in general, as an empty beyond; its sublating of itself into the finite is a return from an empty flight, the *negation* of the beyond which ['the beyond'] is inherently a *negative*.[214]

A speculative thesis which is *ontological*, rather than subjective, it is far from evident that it guarantees that *reason* advance by so much as a single step, let alone that it was a necessity that it be born in the first place to look haughtily down its nose at the dinosaurs and the dodo.

It may be that the two philosophers have here been talking at cross-purposes. Badiou admires Hegel's affirmation against Kant that we can seize and develop truths possessed of full effectivity. But, contrary to Hegel, he entirely rejects and rules out transcendentalism: he refuses to distinguish the epistemic level from the ontologico-metaphysical level, a refusal which seems at least in part to be a consequence of his approval of 'Parmenides' aphorism : "The same, itself, is both thinking and being."'[215] But Hegel, as a matter of fact, distinguishes *two different instances of* self-relating negativity. There is that ontological instance of it which we have just analyzed, and another, subjective and – in a sense – transcendental[216], instance, namely, Spirirt (*Geist*),

[214] Hegel, *SLB*, 116. My interposition.

[215] Badiou, *BE*, 38.

[216] That Hegel aims to radicalize Kantian transcendentalism – rather than to swipe it aside – is a view held by commentators such as Béatrice Longuenesse and Dionysias Christias, not only amongst those who subscribe to the 'non-metaphysical' reading associated with Robert Pippin. It is very interesting to observe

which is introduced by the allegory of the lord and bondsman in the *Phenomenology*, and of which the conditions will not be assembled in the *Logic* until the *Doctrine of Essence*, for which one must wait to witness that second negation which is specific to the fleeting appearance of finite being. By way of this particular negation of the negation, being stops fleeing and perishing in instability. It is not until here, retroactively, that its disappearance disappears to give way to stabilities allowing for mediated logical relations to be spotted and constructed (constructed-spotted).

Certainly, one can appreciate that Badiou would work to discredit and rebuff any notion that the first instance of auto-sublating negativity, the ontological one, could *guarantee* the flourishing of the second, subjective instance of it.[217] However, this does not exhaust the motivation of Badiou's objection, and the next stage will prove to be more thorny.

II.

6. *Badiou: exclusive negativity*

When Hegel moves on to the *quantitative* 'something', it becomes apparent that the same procedure for the phase-shifting of bad into good won't be repeatable. What gets in the way is that the quantitative something is *without Other*. In quanta there is a total absence of negative interior mediation; they are without cease 'the same': *indifferently* self-identical *just as much as* identical-to-the-other. Quanta are indifferent to qualitative-categorial difference. The algebraic hieroglyph or numerical figure, in the logic of its *being*, is, right off the bat, dispersed in self-exterior multiplicity. Hegel writes that 'the quantum itself is so limited, as to be indifferent with respect to its limit, and hence with respect to other quanta and its "beyond."'[218] Let us take a look at the (set-theoretical) reading of this statement proposed by Badiou. For example, in the series of prime numbers (2, 3, 5, …*n*) there never arrives a trigger-moment at which the series could consolidate the unrelenting hiccup of yet another iteration, always once again homogenous, by, so to speak, 'crashing into' and 'rebelling against' a qualitative Other such as to prove and affirm itself as qualitatively different from any other arithmetical series. In the juxtaposition 'A A', or between one square and another matching square drawn beside it, the iterations are at one and the

---

that for Kant the transcendental 'I' is first of all 'this […] It (the thing) which thinks' (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A346/B404.)

[217] In passing, it must be noted that Badiou nuances his portrait of Hegel in the volume which closes his systematic trilogy. For this, see Badiou, *L'Immanence des vérités. L'Être et l'Événement, 3*, Paris: Fayard, 2018, 84-86.

[218] Hegel, *SLB*, 190. My interposition.

same time quantitatively different, *and* strongly identical. As far as Number is concerned, 'its in-difference is […] that of proliferating the same-as-self outside of self'[219]. If, in the number-series, there is no ceiling or fixed upper limit in the direction of the infinitly large – as we see in the magnitudes of infinity which are Cantor's 'Alephs' –, equally, 'inside itself it remains external: it is the infinitely small'[220]: the infinitesimal of differential calculus. 'Number, the organization of quantitative infinity, seems to be universally bad.'[221]

Badiou deliberately ignores empirical evidence regarding the behaviour of letters written in ink or chalk, and holds that, in their mathematical roles – and *therefore* in their *being* – they are nothing other than bare Ones, which, taken as such, rebuff any re-presentation. In a salutary speculative move, letters are conceived, if we may thusly put it, as 'dashes' which produce themselves by crossing themselves out.[222] They are *without relation*, and so proliferate interminably.

In *Being and Event*, 'being-nothing'[223] is the name given by Badiou to pure inconsistency, his version of negativity, a negativity which is entirely non-dialectical, non-determinative: a total nothingness. In his own philosophical edifice (that of 1988), he reserves 'non-being' for the status of the 'count-as-one'[224]. This is the operation which allows the minimal scrap of being – *quidditas* or 'dash': the nondescript unified One – to distinguish itself from being-nothing and present itself in existence in order to be named. 'Existence' is defined as 'being-in-presentation'. What is this? It is what has been rendered *consistent*, along the lines of a quasi-mathematical functioning of the term 'consistent', namely as meaning: self-identical and non-contradictory. The count-as-one, as operation, cannot be itself hardened into an element-endowed-with-being-in-presentation, not without initiating a vicious regression. Hence its status of *non-being*. 'Being', when it hereto forth starts to complexify itself, is thus woven solely out of the name of the (set theoretical) void ('∅'):

---

[219] Badiou, *BE*, 168.

[220] *Ibid.*

[221] *Ibid.*

[222] Cf. *BE*, 52-59 (especially 56-57), 66-69. 'Dash' and 'crossing out' are not Badiou's own terms. I use them heuristically, taking inspiration from Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash – The Other Side of Absolute Knowing*, Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 2018.

[223] Badiou, *BE*, 53.

[224] Cf. Badiou, *BE*, 23-30, 53.

a non-relational positivity ('without Other') not hypostatized as an object: 'a pure *proper name*, which indicates itself, [and] which does not bestow any index of difference within what it refers to'[225]. Badiou thereby forges his weapon of non-categorial exteriority with which to cut indifferently across the line of separation between infinity and finitude. This weapon is among the tools with which he aims to satisfy a project which precedes *Being and Event* by a long way and which has for goal to undermine not only docile types of pragmatism, but also what we might call 'greedy reductionism'.[226] Since 1988, a non-categorial exteriority which is indifferent to difference eats away at the obviousness of any 'fact' or criterion of success, as its blindspot *and* its condition of effectivity. Indifference uproots the given not only from any foundational metaphysical reference point, but also from any positable *explanatory* reference point.

7. *The quantitative infinity: good or bad?*

This non-categorial exteriority allows Badiou to reject 'interior negativity', which he considers to add up to little more than a conservative, strained, and ultimately incoherent attempt to 'generate' the ammunition supposed to swipe aside the very finite obstructions which are its own ingredients; these ingredients being *a posteriori* determinacies, and the fortuitously current regime of classification furnishing them. This rejection applies just as much, and with full force, to the Hegelian definition of the infinite.[227] Nevertheless, rather than despairing or hesitating, Hegel launches himself into the challenge undaunted and believes himself able to put a stop to the 'badness' implied by the lack of Other insinuating itself through the proliferation of quanta. He claims to effectuate the 'good quantitative infinity' which puts quantity in its proper relation-to-itself – and allows him to display it as 'for-itself' – by, so to speak, 'submerging' it in a negativity coextensive with its simple discernment from that which it is not. According to him the discernment of quality qua quality from quantity qua quantity is consummated and sealed when we realize that the indifference proper to number finds itself determined *as indifference* thanks to its *difference* with, or from, the whole kingdom of differences. Indifference is qualitatively different to difference. It *denies* or *negates* difference, in a determinate negation:

---

[225] Cf. Badiou*, BE*, 59. Cf. also 57-58.

[226] Cf. Badiou, *The Concept of Model: An Introduction to the Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics*, ed. & trans. Zachary Luke Fraser and Tzuchien Tho, Melbourne: re.press, 2007 [1969], where among his adversaries are W. V. O. Quine's refined pragmatism (which will be discussed in Chapter 8 of this study) and Rudolph Carnap's reductive intra-scientific physicalism.

[227] In *L'Immanence des vérités* Badiou entitles a subsection 'A maxim: only exteriority protects interiority' (86-87).

'because quantitative determinacy is difference, only sublated, the quantitative is, in its being-outside-of-self, itself.'[228] Inversely, it is difference which negates the semblance of auto-intelligibility-bestowing independence which, to begin with, lurked like an invisible hard-edged logical fog over quantitative indifference. And what is more – of course –, as far as Hegel is concerned this dialectical articulation is *itself* a moment in the effectuation of the good infinity.

Badiou rebuffs this solution of Hegel's, which seems to him to have merely slapped onto quantity an inconsequential second-order meta-nomination, like a biro-smeared scrap of paper:

> But in my eyes this doesn't work. What exactly doesn't work? It's the nomination. I have no quarrel with there being a qualitative essence of quantity, but why name it 'infinity'? [...] In numerical proliferation there is no void because the exterior of the One *is* its interior, the pure law which causes the same-as-the-One to proliferate. The radical absence of the other, indifference, renders illegitimate here any declaration that the essence of finite number, its numericity, is infinite.[229]

It stems from Badiou's premises in 1988 that that only an *undecidable* can force a pure decision, and that only pure decisions can – in the torsion of the infinite upon the finite – disjoin from the finite a *truth* or truths. For him, a *purely exterior exteriority* – deprived of meaning and foreign to alterity, inviolate of the qualitative void – must permit the name of a non-discernible unforeseeable to be scribbled in an alphabet endowed with a strict independence. A nominative capacity freely indifferent to what it names is the order of the day. Well, since quanta-marks are indifferent to difference, their handling *must* be dictated – and *a fortiori* in the ZF axiomatization of set theory – 'in exteriority', by way of rules stipulated in the absence of given criteria for their stipulation. Hence, as we have glimpsed, the 'initial thesis' of the 1988 book is that 'mathematics *is* ontology'[230].

As it happens, this explains why, for Badiou, the *sole* undecidable fit to force a decisional intervention in favour of the truth of the actuality of infinity is Cantor's 'Continuum Hypothesis'. This concerns the non-denumerable and highly 'proliferating' gap between two Alephs. The

---

[228] A phrase from the 1812 *Doctrine of Being* not included in the English translations, which we have therefore translated from the French: Hegel, *Science de la logique. Livre premier – L'être. Textes de 1812 et 1832*, 347.

[229] Badiou, *BE*, 169.

[230] Badiou, *BE*, 3, 4.

Hypothesis has been proven non-provable, and the gap organizable or orderable only if we axiomatize the incalculable non-determined. Nonetheless, we face up to a surprising circularity between the 'initial thesis' and the treatment of infinity. Badiou uses mathematics when he proposes that it is the anonymously undecidable – the incalculable non-determined – which alone forces any and all interventions succeeding in cutting the tethers of the finite. But the decision that it is to mathematics that one must refer in order to appreciate that this proposition must obligatorily be made can itself be said to be forced or obliged *by mathematics*. Badiou's riposte will be that this circularity is a virtuously broken one. Taking ZF as a model – or rather, to be much more accurate, as *the inscription* – of 'being' is the upshot and resulting action of Badiou's reasoning about indifference: his reasoning on and around that anonymous in-betweeness which is undecidable, because indifferent. That the indifferent alphabet that is ZF is supposed to interrupt the Hegelian dialectic is a conclusion which is attained in a fashion which is itself altogether remarkably dialectical.

Badiou's infinity holds itself then in a 'pure disjunction'[231]. In his eyes, Hegel *loses* the non-void, the inert Zero which disjoins quantity from quality. This point redoubles the point regarding the generative virtuality taken to surreptitiously spill out of the Hegelian void, and I would like to take one final stab at putting it into question by way of concluding my comparison.

III.

8. *Syntax without semantics, and the stochastic*

Inevitably and more or less overtly, Badiou has *ontologized positivity*. Seeing as the 'proper name' of the void auto-discerns itself without supplementary mediation, we are obliged to conclude that it is self-identical. It seems clear therefore that *consistency* (positive) has been superimposed with *being* (actual and effective). The agreeably tenebrous words – let's allow ourselves to call them 'gothic', although this has nothing to do with anything – on being-nothing and non-being ultimately only confirm that non-self-identical negativity has been *excluded* from positivity: *opposed* to it and then excluded from it.

It seems to us that this exclusion is the operator by which – with reference to the mission of surpassing finite constraints – Badiou blocks the deployment of the categorial-qualitative determinations harboured by the *semantic resources of language*, be they quotidian or specialized. Badiou unbinds and unleashes a *positivity* in the dash, using it to transform all *active negativity* into a worn out, scrubbed-dry limping continuity, or a continuity that is ideologically corrupt. As his thinking moves forwards, the prospect simply of people giving *reasons* in natural language which would motivate a certain choice's being perhaps more efficacious than another

[231] Badiou, *BE*, 169.

in the goal of breaking with the cloying staleness of the regimes currently in circulation starts to look to him irremeably *stuck in the poisoned embrace of the exhaustedly trite*.

To take up again the example of the vine, for Badiou, the laws of chemistry cannot *sublate* its capricious variation from green to red, because even the difference between diversity and invariance is going to be too 'interiorizing', cozily felt-insulated, and smugly sealed off from being disturbed by any exteriority. In science, as elsewhere, he believes that the only means for the production of a novelty which is 'generic' – separative of actual constraints, and thus (in a Kantian echo) spontaneist[232] – is a *syntax* (a mathematical one, but also including enunciative auto-predication) capable of selecting its construction-bricks without need of given criteria, which is to say capable of selecting them in a fashion that is quasi-stochastic, or even hyper-stochastic: explicitly avowed to 'an infinite series of aleatory [*hasardeuses*] encounters.'[233] However, if he thus commits himself to avoiding intercourse with semantic facticities, is this not in large part because semantic determinacy reveals itself to be the domain precisely in which negativity consequentially entwines itself with, and in, positivity?

9. *Hegel again: the non-identity of identity, and vice versa*

Indeed, for Hegel the self-identity of an alphabet of crossings-out which would wish itself purely disjoint from dialectical mediation is in no way free of metaphysical presuppositions. These latter are to be posited in the hinge where quality 'flips over' into quantity, syntax into semantics. The traversal across these polarities, whereby speculative thought passes from one of their poles to the other, no doubt happens as with a sharp click or a sudden snap, but – crucially for our understanding of Hegel – it is carried out *without discontinuity* in the mutually negating concretion of their *Ideas*. This speculative displacement between what were apparently simple 'opposites' is a modal shift in the manner of logical functioning pertaining to the act of determination. At the same time, and by the same token, it is a shift in transcendental perspective – with regard, specifically, to the *mode of limitation*: *either* stipulated-in-exteriority, *or* articulated-through-interiority. And this too is a determinate negation, rather than an 'exclusion': stipulation lacks intelligibility if separated from articulation.

Equally, the Positive, far from squashing the Negative from the vantage of a haughty independence, itself only escapes the deceitful immediacy of the first negation – the negation through a simple opposition – by coinciding with, and 'reflecting itself into' its *Other*, where *its* Other is the Negative. It may or may not be apposite to say that words are just 'the sonorous dust'

[232] Cf. Badiou, *BE*, 253, 247.

[233] *Ibid.*, 399.

of the voice[234]. In any case, it is only by speaking them that we can unearth hidden presuppositions. And so,

> even to external reflection [the perspective of the understanding] it will be a matter of simple consideration that the positive, to start with, is not a simple identity but is rather, on the one hand, opposed to the negative – has meaning only in this reference to it and therefore entails the negative *in its very concept* – and, on the other hand, is inherently the self-referring negation of mere positedness or of the negative and therefore is itself implicitly the *absolute negation*.[235]

Self-identity, in so far as it is at work in actual effectivity, neither *generates itself* in a *causa sui* style, nor *presents itself* from out of itself in a transparently intelligible manner. The term only obtains to its own independence through the contradiction in which it sublates itself with and in its contrary. An account of this sort is what is called for, as far as Hegel is concerned, if we are to let go of the vestiges of simply-exterior legislative authority inherited from classical metaphysics. Lebrun gives the screw another turn:

> Likewise for the Negative in-itself, when we try to think it in its specificity, 'counter to the Positive'. It suffices to elucidate the determination which has been its characteristic since Plato ('the opposed in itself', 'the unequal in itself') in order to make it develop into what is signified by its Other. 'Other', 'non-identical' by definition, it nevertheless acquires a nature in line with this very definition. Self-identical *by the fact of always being Other*, it too transgresses its initial determination; in turn it expulses itself from itself, because it remains itself only by taking on the form of 'identity' which its role is to exclude.[236]

There is no trap-door exit allowing mediation to be put at arm's length, if what interests us is effectivity. But this does not prevent the sonorous dust of the voice from naming itself indifferently as the name of all names as such. That the *immediate* be intelligible thanks to its

[234] Lebrun, *La Patience du concept*, 299.

[235] Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (*Book Two: The Doctrine of Essence*), 379. My interposition.

[236] Lebrun, *La Patience du concept*, 296.

distinction from its Other, the mediated, does not mean that it is 'less real'. If the finite *is not really*, it follows that speech – isolated from the syllogisms it composes – is made out of brittle jaundiced waste. But, dialectically, apparent aridity need not necessarily exclude fertility.[237] There is then no need to worry about the irreflexive immediacy of a mark which directly names itself being confused with a fairytale birthing-pool. But we suggest that Badiou, in 1988, goes too far in the other direction by spurning as phantasmatic any concrete content that might be distinguished from spartan form. The infinite, considered as a type of *act* or *happening*, is itself suffused with non-being. It is not a structure, nor the simple opposite of structure, and it does not leave contents in peace but *destroys* certain of them in raising them up to the Absolute. If our argumentation here is accepted, the question imposes itself as to whether the sequestration of finite incompleteness in 'pure disjunction' may leave behind, instead of an *in*finite, or *in*finity, merely 'that which is not finite'[238], rendered by Bernard Bourgeois as 'le *non*-fini'[239]: an abstract first negation of finitude.

10. *Negating the immediacy of contingency*

Undoubtedly, without a non-reflexive – stubbornly mutinous – negativity, to which to solder knowing and doing, we will remain stuck on the first negation. But, concerning the infinite, 'actual' does not mean 'exteriorly *causa sui*, self-standing, and auto-unveiling'. This is a conclusion which, after Cantor's intervention, will admittedly appear absurd – *unless* we kick the addiction to the last leftovers of auto-sufficient substantiality by following Hegel in allowing non-being to enter into being. The actuality of the infinite – including its Cantorian actuality – would have remained forever in obscurity, without cognitive mediation – thereby failing to make a difference *to thought* – were it not thanks to the reflexive meta-loop of transcendental self-consciousness. That the Zero predicates itself of itself, allowing thought (in principle) to wrench itself away from submission to accidentally current categories and determinables, plugging itself into indifference, so be it – but only downstream from the operativity of predication and nomination. The debatable adhesion to Parmenides' aphorism seems to be the only thing permitting the sending back of these functions from the transcendental to be spread out and proliferated in the tissue of 'being'.

---

[237] Cf. Badiou, *L'Immanence des vérités*, 93-105. In the *Phenomenology* Hegel analyzes the judgement '*the spirit is a bone*' against reductionism: the skull is first of all the idea of the skull.

[238] Hegel, *SLB*, 110.

[239] Hegel, *Science de la logique. Livre premier – L'être. Textes de 1812 et 1832*, 200. Our italics.

In the Hegelian optic, infinity is indifferent to the difference between exterior and interior, just as much as to that between qualitative difference and quantitative indifference. So indifferent that it is indifferent to its own indifference. From this point of view, notwithstanding their speculative hinge, there is no possible synthesis of quantity and quality which would make one block the other. The really effective – negating and productive – 'exteriority' is not simple but reveals itself to be that exteriority which is interlaced with a dose of interiority in the twist of the mobius strip. The interior *is* the exterior, *plus* the addition of a large serving of opacity and epistemic mediation.

Badiou is, importantly, quite right to affirm that thought's spontaneity – whether mathematical or otherwise – implies that there is always a quotient of arbitrariness in any decision. But the fact that the determinacies we encounter cannot dictate to us what to do with them does not preclude that we do in fact bump into 'clues' which might help to negate really constraining obstructions. If the procedure loyal to the infinite is conceived by Badiou as 'random, and in *no way* predetermined by knowledge'[240], it seems to us that this conception would not be feasible had contingency qua randomness not been superimposed upon an infinite presupposed as holding itself by and from itself in a self-standing 'outside' of the regimes of necessity semantically mapped in the zone of finitude, a short-circuit which crushes all constitutive mediation of 'inside' with 'outside'. Indeed, we may doubt that 'contingency' retains any conceptual force or meaning in the sphere of the Cantorian mathematical infinite: isn't contingency a qualitative-relational concept, which is to say, a dialectical one? By using the weapon of random contingency to attack the false modesty of the relativist cult of finitude, does Badiou not end up, in 1988 and 2006, in an unfortunate proximity with another finitist enemy, that of *laissez-faire* neoliberal economism? After all, it is Hayek and Freidman who maintain that the world is an aleatory mess so bewildering that the mission of understanding it should be abandoned and the partial calibration of jostling egoisms delegated to the market. It is true that Badiou attacks them too by aiming to sharpen the intelligibility and tractability of disorder and noise through the set-theoretical mathematization of indifference, a move which demystifies indeterminacy. However, by answering the question 'Why is there a diverse variation from green to red?' with the denial that there could be any reason *or any cause*, he risks mystifying the determined. Reducing all categorially individuated contents to the stochastic: won't this tend to hobble the negation of the finite given, to the extent that it renders its determinacy unintelligible? I would argue that we should rather affirm that *hypothetical explanation* has its role to play in the surpassing of the given, alongside quasi-syntactical formalization.

The distinction between causal invariance and incalculable spontaneity is qualitative. But

[240] Badiou, *BE*, 337. Our italics.

this does not imply that spontaneity is flattened when we posit chemical laws to account for the apparent caprice of the colours. Rather, reason strives to understand and unravel the *contradictions* it finds on the level of the understanding – on the level of representation – and this in order to open up, rather than close down, the way leading to more *new* contradictions.

'Being' is sublated in essence, but there is a leftover which remains, and this is precisely *Schein*, being's flickering in identity with non-being. The possibility of getting things wrong implies *ought-to-bes* and *ought-to-dos*[241] which are irreducible to any positively brut fact. The challenge bequeathed by Hegel seems then to concern the articulation, or alternatively the disjunction, of qualitative difference as such, and in its fortuitous facticity, not only with nominalism – as Badiou hints in spite of his rejection – but also with a speculative and transcendental conception of causality as a *form of mediation*. As Sellars quips – although not so quippingly – 'The motto of the age of science might well be: *Natural philosophers have hitherto sought to understand "meanings"; the task is to change them.*'[242]

[241] For '*ought-to-bes*' and '*ought-to-dos*' see Wilfrid Sellars, 'Language as Thought and as Communication', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 29 (4), 1969, 506-527.

[242] Sellars, 'Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities', in eds. Herbert Feigl, Michael Scriven & Grover Maxwell, *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Volume II*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958, 225-308, 288.

Section IV
Fraught with *Ought*

time cannot be a determination of outer appearances; it belongs neither to a shape or a position, etc., but on the contrary determines the relation of representations in our inner state. And just because this inner intuition yields no shape we also attempt to remedy this lack through analogies, and represent the temporal sequence through a line progressing to infinity.

Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*[243]

you can't kill me I was born dead

Big L, 'Put It On'[244]

[243] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A33/B49-B50, 163.

[244] Big L (Lamont Coleman), song lyric, 'Put It On', album *Lifestylez ov da Poor & Dangerous*, Columbia-Sony, 1994.

Chapter 7
Successional Knowing and Metaphysical Happening: Hegelianizing the Hyperkantian Solution

1. *A trilemma in Sellars regarding temporalities*

Allow us to begin this final Section by presenting the following trilemma, which we believe to be faced by the reader of Wilfrid Sellars. Our contention will be that the three propositions constituting the trilemma harbor an interesting apparent mutual inconsistency:

Sellarsian proposition i.) **Our subjective impression of the flow and directionality of phenomenological and narrative time is a non-substantial illusion: a side-effect of linguistic inference**. We must immediately nuance this proposition by stating that, while all models of natural-material temporality are for Sellars equally non-substantial – with no conceivable mode of temporality being non-mediately self-standing nor transparently self-presenting – nonetheless, the effective epistemic force of linguistic inference remains irreducible. The twist here is hence necessarily that the time of the dialectic of knowledge and error: of waiting, desiring, and fumbling for knowledge – a time constrained by epistemic finitude to the meta-form of *succession* – is unbypassable. One cannot leap-frog over the manifest image of man-in-the-world.

Sellarsian proposition ii.) **Sellars proposes**, in rivalry with Whitehead, **a revisionary metaphysics of 'absolute process', suggesting that ultimate material processes are such that temporal *successiveness* is, with respect to them, *not* a pertinent form**. The absolute processes in question are objectless and subjectless; hence conceiving of them as preceding or following one another seems to make little sense. Indeed, '[i]n the case of absolute processes we can speak of *absolute* coming to be and ceasing to be'[245]. One is allusively put in mind of the Einsteinian spatio-temporal continuum, where time is a facet of space, and *vice versa*. And equally – striving to get a richer and more specific preliminary allegorical grasp upon the adumbrated absolute temporality – of the non-objectal 'quantum fluctuation' whereby particle-antiparticle pairs sprout from a zero-energy vacuum state, thence to return, or again, in parallel to this image, of the treatment by Quantum Field Theory of particles as excited states of their underlying fields. All of these references are, however, only heuristically convenient analogies, chosen by us in order to preview the exposition of Sellars's absolute processes

[245] Sellars, 'Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process' (The Carus Lectures). *The Monist* 64 (1981), 3-90, lecture II, §69. Available online at http://www.ditext.com/sellars/carus200.html. Henceforth FMPP.

– indeed, as the reader will have inferred, a key principle for Sellars is that to metaphysically reify any more or less modish natural-scientific theory is a solecism. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the citation of Quantum Field Theory has claws, for Sellars himself humorously (but also quite seriously) suggests as names of processes 'electronings' and 'quarkings'[246]. As we will try to stress, his proposal is a skeletally constructive post-Kantian case of reasoning-by-the-absurd, aiming to avoid a stymying mystification, and should not too hastily be tarred with the brush of complacent positivistic armchair speculation.

Sellarsian proposition iii.) **Sellars is also committed to a materialist monism, and is, furthermore, a nominalist with respect to abstract entities**. Indeed, the just-mentioned mystification which he wishes to avoid would be that of an unexplainable dualism.

We shall proceed to flesh out the forks of this triad one by one, in order to bring out what we take to be the interesting apparent contradiction emerging across them.

i.) For Sellars, phenomenological time – in its apparent 'flow' and directionality – is a side-effect of the intentionality pertaining to linguistic inference and (our mild extension and extrapolation from this) to the subjective desires concomitant with that intentionality. More precisely, and for the sake of a thoroughness from which will we soon attempt to reap dividends, he holds, firstly, that phenomenological time is an effect *exclusively* of this linguistic and meta-linguistic inferential intentionality *on the level of self-consciousness*; *and*, secondly, also that the condition of effectivity of this phenomenologically temporalizing inferential intentionality is, *on the level of physical intuition*, the transcendental operativity of certain Kantian-formal logical connectives.

Or should we perhaps rather say: on the level of physical intuition the condition of effectivity of phenomenologically temporalizing inferential intentionality is the transcendental operativity of certain quasi-*mathematical* or quasi-*computational* operators? – As we will have reason below to review in more detail, on Sellars' reconstructive reading of Kant an intuition is never an intuition of a bare particular. Rather than being a *sheer* demonstrative 'this', an intuition is always an intuition of something *as* something, as a 'this such': intuitions are always seeings-*as*, hearings-*as*, touchings-*as*, tastings-*as*, smellings-*as*. Intuitions thus always have grammatical (predicative) form, internal complexity, and categorial-judgmental content. Hence the statement

[246] FMPP, III §114.

'This pyramid is made of stone' necessarily lets its subject-of-predication, the intuition of the indexed pyramid, be unpacked as the complex demonstrative 'This *is a* pyramid… [*and* it is made of stone]'[247]. What this allows us to flag up is that there is for Sellars no reason, in principle, to refuse to analyze the perception of physical events in *time* in a manner strictly analogous with the Kantian method by which one may analyze the perception of *spatial* structures. The 'basement level' as regards temporal perception can just as easily be conceived as stretching from the sensibility (made of the skeletal empty *forms* of intuition) up through the workshop of Kant's schematizing imagination. This latter is named by Sellars the 'picturing' faculty, and is viewed by him as an apparatus plotting transformations which preserve isomorphisms, but opaquely and to a not-second-guessable underdetermined second-order… in such a way that some of Sellars' readers conceive the activity of this faculty as being treatable neurophysiologically and in mathematized information-theoretic terms[248]. This is all by way of saying that: what guides an *ideal representation*, in the manifold of sense, of a *sequential* time-series may well be, in the physical order, a *non-sequential* set of determinations.[249]

---

[247] Cf. Sellars, 'The Role of Imagination in Kant's Theory of Experience' in *In the Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, eds. Kevin Scharp & Robert Brandom, Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2007, 454-466, 464-465.

[248] For reasons which will soon become clear, this is not a stake in which we are directly interested here. Furthermore, we worry that such an approach may risk a positivizing metaphysical calcification of the neurophysiological model. Sellars is just as hostile to the hypostatization of the theoretical entities making up the Scientific Image as he is to that of the everyday items making up the manifest world. Neither type is simply-given and hence, we might say, both are shot through with the 'non-being' of the concept. This might be seen in the following quotation, where Sellars is ruminating on how a painted red table can be said to 'be red' *by virtue of* being covered with a layer of red paint:

> But the red paint is not itself red by virtue of a component – a 'surface' or 'expanse'; a particular with no thickness – which is red. There may, let me repeat, turn out to be some place in the total philosophical picture for the statement that there 'really are' such particulars, and that they are elements in perceptual experience. But this place is not to be found by an analysis of ordinary perceptual discourse, any more than Minkowski four-dimensional Space-Time worms are an *analysis* of what we mean when we speak of physical objects in Space and Time. (Sellars, 'Epistemology and the Philosophy of Mind', in Sellars, *Science, Perception, and Reality*, Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1991, 129-194, 154.)

[249] Cf. Sellars, 'Appendix: Inner Sense' in *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes*, Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1992 [1967], 215-222; on this point see especially 217-220. *Preceding/earlier-than* and *following/later-than* are characteristics or structural properties of successiveness which pertain *prima facie* to mere *sequences of perceptions* – as opposed to pertaining to the apperceptively seized,

What is clear, and what is of most interest to us in this first prong of our trilemma, is that when it comes to self-consciousness (the term 'self-consciousness' encompassing the realm of determinate givenness which we are capable of directly reflecting upon and speaking about), experiential *and* logico-conceptual time in Sellars' view are, per se, equally both temporalities of judgement and inference. They are both times of inferring, anticipating, desiring, remembering, and ordering or organizing *through predication and through propositions and syllogisms*. Concomitantly, these relational modalities of experiential, inferentially mediated time – be they linear or torturously non-linear or convolutedly retroactive and broken – are for him entirely unhinged and separate from the non-mediated material realm in-itself. Let us further flesh out Sellars' disjunctive circumscription of merely transcendental experiential-subjective time with a few scatter-shot references to some vivid passages from his writings.

Seeking to dislodge propositional-agential time from any supposed substantial 'in-itselfness', in the (relatively) famous – or, some would say, notorious – lectures presenting his 'Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process', Sellars broaches the temporality of the ordered narration of historical happenings, and proffers an analysis of the statement: 'Nero fiddled while Rome burned.'[250] His aim here is to evacuate all narrative ordering from our conception of the real-metaphysical events which the monist materialist – such a monist materialist as Sellars himself – will claim the statement is, ultimately and in-the-last-metaphysical-instance, 'about'. He wants to tear up the commonsensical positivist-empiricist construal of the happenings in question and the relations between them, *qua* recounted in the story-telling sentence, as 'corresponding', in terms of *resemblance*, to events in the real order outside of the web of inference. The stakes in the lecture as a whole are not skeptical, but, on the contrary, speculative-metaphysical (or at least, revisionary-metaphysical), and yet a sharp *disjunction* is the order of the day. To this end, Sellars points out that the terms constituted by the expressions flanking

'flowing' and directional, full-bloodedly non-simultaneous *perception of a sequence*. These characteristics can thus be deployed just as legitimately with reference to that form of intuition which is spatial as with regard to that form of intuition which is temporal. Sellars says of the example of a series of rapid-fire snapshots recording the positions of someone's arm as they raise it in the direction of the ceiling, where the earlier stages of the snapshot-sequence fade and wash out in vivacity somewhat in the manner of Humean impressions, that 'these sensory states have a common origin, and do not differ, in principle, from a complex sensory representing such as might be involved in the [spatial] perception of a Hindu god the [in the accompanying rudimentary stick-figure diagram, eight] arms of which were differently illuminated', the lower earthwards pointing of the god's arms being shrouded in shadow of an increasing tenebrosity, while the highest skyward-reaching arms are sharply lit (218, interpositions mine).

[250] FMPP, II, §32.

'while' in the sentence concerning the emperor's questionable occupation during the conflagration of the eternal city are in fact themselves sentences, as opposed to singular terms; that 'while' therefore cannot be *predicated of* the first sentence-term in the way in which a relational term such as 'is next to' would be predicated of a singular term; and that 'while' (like 'before', 'during', and 'after') is hence *not* (and this 'not' is the 'not' of the Kantian critique of metaphysics) a relation-word expressing an intrinsic ontological relation, but should rather be viewed either as an extrinsic 'temporal connective', or as an adverb. This analysis is of a piece with Sellars' contention that '*[t]here are no temporal relations*'[251], a somewhat enigmatic declaration appearing in the midst of a clipped and staccato presentation, but which we take as bridling against the *metaphysical reification* of discursively determined events within time-series: that is, as proscribing not only the metaphysical hypostatization of the discursively-individuated relata, but also the metaphysical hypostatization of the relations in which these relata stand to one another. If a temporal connective is – when interrogated vis-à-vis its metaphysical status (and not vis-à-vis its narrative-discursive function) – in fact an *adverb*, then we obtain the (skeletally) formal result that the discursively-individuated relata need not be hardened into quasi-physical 'objects', while the relation between them can be construed as a *mode* of happening. That is to say, the temporal relation between two relata can be construed, on a metaphysical level, as a sort of pattern-interference between 'absolute patterns' – the absolute processes – which, as we will see in the next fork of the trilemma, are tied neither to objects nor to grammatical subjects, and which are dynamic and non-particular.[252] Sellars can hereupon be aligned with Schelling, in that an explicit monist concern of his is to avoid a dualism of *sensibilia* and physics and thereby to dodge a multiplication of kinds (of things) or of realms. On this interpretation, the affinity with Schelling would turn around a shared rejection of a conception of metaphysical time – or of space-time – as a metrical graph or grill 'in' which an absolute process might be located, as if 'inside' a *container*. Indeed, it will be important to note that the absolute processes sketched by Sellars do not unfurl themselves *in* time, but rather unfurl *time itself* through their inherent happening[253].

---

[251] FMPP, II, §30.

[252] An illuminating analysis of this point is provided in an unpublished conference paper by Diana Khamis, 'Ontology and Process in Schelling and Sellars', North American Schelling Society Meeting, 2015. Our treatment of time in this chapter has benefitted from her analysis.

[253] The borrowing of this insightful turn of phrase has been made from the paper by Khamis, *op cit*.

Is Sellars here more Schellingian than he is Hegelian? This is a tricky question. However, we can look at a quotation in which Hegel is in agreement with Schelling in mocking Kant withholding space and time from the thing-in-itself, which, humorously, are 'eaten' by subjectivity:

However, what we wish to stress for this spike of our triad is a more Kantian facet of Sellars's treatment of this issue, namely that – as already indicated – while time as we conceive it narratologically, and as we experience it phenomenologically, for him offers zero transparency with regard to physico-material time, nonetheless the logico-conceptual temporalities accruing to predication, proposition and inference remain epistemically *irreducible*, and continue to monopolize effective consequentialness for thought and action, due precisely to our lack of any other (or, simply: any) transparent Mythically Given yardsticks of orientation or way-station markers along the pathways of succession. Regarding phenomenological time, in the 'Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process' lectures Sellars squares off the basement breeze-blocks of formally given, not-necessarily-sequential, physical-temporal sets of determinations (present through the Kantian 'sensibility'), plus quasi-geometrically workshopped picturings, by building on the above-ground storeys of untrammeled conceptual inference. One needs the understanding, and also the faculty of reason, in order to obtain any phenomenological duration at all. We can, then, cite the following confirmation, apropos of the example of a series of musical notes ending with a G#, which G# was preceded by an E*b*, and of which the first pitch sounded was a C# (Sellars has nominalized the sounding of C# notes as 'C#ings', for reasons to be explained through the second spike of our triad):

> The things which are eaten possess neither mouth nor teeth, and just as consciousness imposes eating on things, so too it imposes space and time on them: just as it places things between mouth and teeth, so too it places them in space and time. (Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, volume 3, trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, 461.)

This joke may chime with Schelling, but elsewhere in Hegel we read:

> for the benefit of those who are crass enough to attach a wholly incongruous importance to the question of the *reality* of space and time, [...] they are extremely primitive and superficial determinations [...] *Cognitive* thinking does not halt at these forms, but apprehends things in their Notion, which contains space and time as sublated within it. (Hegel, *Philosophy of Subjective Sprit: Volume 3*, ed. & trans. M. J. Petry, Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978, 135.)

This on the contrary seems to bring forth the famous disagreement with Schelling. One might add that, while, as we understand it, Schelling does not embrace contradiction, it is not clear that Sellars would reject it.

> The C#ings, whose career in the t-dimension [the non-sequential dimension of ordering, through a form of intuition in the sensibility, of 'the (temporally) simultaneous constituents of a sensory state (si) of the subject' (FMPP II §131), introduced above via the example of someone raising their arm] we have been exploring, are *nonconceptual* states of the subject. Merely as existing they provide the subject with no awareness of a C#ing as a C#ing, let alone as having temporal features. As previously pointed out, a sensing which is a C#ing may be called an 'awareness' or a 'state of consciousness,' but then the latter terms are not being used in a cognitive or epistemic sense.
>
> Let us now introduce *conceptual* acts. Without going into the details of a theory of intentionality, let us simply assume that awarenesses-*as* are functional states which are analogous to spontaneous linguistic episodes (thinkings-out-loud) and which, in accordance with their functional roles, are serving as *responses* to the items of which they are the awarenesses. In a perceptual context, such an awareness might be represented by
>
> Lo, the red and rectangular facing side of a brick![254]

Sellars proposes to dissolve the classic problem of coherently disentangling the paradoxical seeming coincidence of simultaneity and successiveness implied by the vague notion of durational 'flow' – the problem of the 'specious present', treated by Husserl and others[255] – in the following way.

---

[254] FMPP, II §140-141. Our interposition. We have taken the liberty of hyphenating and adding italics to 'awarenesses-*as*'.

[255] Cf. Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics*, 217, where we get a definition of 'that puzzling feature of experience which is called the specious present, which, as traditionally conceived, is an incoherent combination of literal simultaneity and literal successiveness.' It seems that the coinage of the term 'specious present' is owed to E. Robert Kelly in 1882, in his anonymously authored *The Alternative: A Study in Psychology* (London: Macmillan and Co). There Kelly writes (page number not available):

> The relation of experience to time has not been profoundly studied. Its objects are given as being of the present, but the part of time referred to by the datum is a very different thing from the conterminous of the past and future which philosophy denotes by the name Present. The present to which the datum refers is really a part of the past—a recent past—delusively given as being a time that intervenes between the past and the

Language is not the *expression* of cognitive awareness, but its very medium. Phenomenological directional temporal flow is a cognitive effect generated by acts of linguistic inference, which, qua finite, are constricted to succession. Succession is to be desubstantialized. What the acts of linguistic inference are ultimately responding to – what is given to the quasi-geometrical, isomorphism-preserving but complex representational machinations of the productive imagination, with whose products inference must work – are, in Sellars' suggested revisionary-metaphysical theory, *somehow 'overlapping' sensory constituents of sensory states of the perceiving subject, which constituents and states of the faculty-of-perceiving-in-act are modally (adverbially-qualitatively) individuated.*[256]

We shall not tarry now over the case of the sounding of pitched sounds, as it will be discussed in the immediately following prong, but rather want before moving on to reemphasize once again, in the most general terms, the Sellarsian epistemic irreducibility of the normative-functional (of which the linguistic is a case in point, if not the paradigm or cornerstone case). The first consequence of the rejection of mythical givenness is that knowing can only be *self-correcting*, because it is logically independent of the causal realm. What we are particularly interested in is the entailment whereby *if* the normative gap between *ought* and *is* is irreducible for knowledge and self-conscious experience, *then* that concomitant of this state of affairs which is *desire* – understood in Lacanian terms – is irreducibly entangled with knowing too, while both (desiring and knowing) are necessarily struck with the potentially deadlocking problem – i.e., a problem which might turn out to be debilitating if no solution to or accommodation with it is found – concerning how to orient themselves within historical temporality. Sticking to quotations from Sellars himself, we can glimpse the entwinement of the irreducibility of the logico-conceptual with the perhaps non-dissolvable conundrum of a hunger which cannot satiate itself and yet cannot stop trying to, and which cannot refrain from restless attempts to narrate a story that might explain its failure. Juxtaposing an admiring gloss on Plato with an aphoristic

> future. Let it be named the specious present, and let the past, that is given as being the past, be known as the obvious past. All the notes of a bar of a song seem to the listener to be contained in the present. All the changes of place of a meteor seem to the beholder to be contained in the present. At the instant of the termination of such series, no part of the time measured by them seems to be a past. Time, then, considered relatively to human apprehension, consists of four parts, viz., the obvious past, the specious present, the real present, and the future. Omitting the specious present, it consists of three [...] nonentities—the past, which does not exist, the future, which does not exist, and their conterminous, the present; the faculty from which it proceeds lies to us in the fiction of the specious present.

[256] To complement FMPP, on this point see also *Science and Metaphysics*, 220-222.

programmatic salvo propels us with the momentum of rationalist optimism onto the threshold of a purposeless compulsion which has been deprived of the luxury of believing itself to have been decimated in the atemporal or hypertemporal force-field of a neo-Spinozist Azathoth[257].

> [W]e can say that the *Republic* lays down the general theme that the realm of Intelligible Being is to be understood in terms of a system of ends and instrumentalities having a complex structure to which violence is done when one claims that the connection between following rules and achieving happiness is an arbitrary one established by power and or convention.[258]

> The ideal aim of philosophizing is to become *reflectively* at home in the full complexity of the multi-dimensional conceptual system in terms of which we suffer, think, and act. [...] It is not until we have eaten the apple with which the serpent philosopher tempts us, that we begin to stumble on the familiar and to feel that haunting sense of alienation which is treasured by each new generation as its unique possession. This alienation, this gap between oneself and one's world, can only be resolved by eating the apple to the core; for after the first bite there is no return to innocence. There are many anodynes, but only one cure. We may philosophize well or ill, but we must philosophize.[259]

---

[257] Azathoth is H. P. Lovecraft's obscenely gargling all-consuming demon-god, who in Lovecraft's stories is located beyond space and time, and yet somehow munches and crunches them up. The name seems an appropriate shorthand for the neo-Spinozist Heideggeriano-Schellingian 'simply-exterior', undialectically absolutized exteriority against which our overarching argument is set. It should be noted that Sellars' absolute processes are *not* non-spatio-temporal. A. N. Whitehead's pan-psychist pan-experientialist metaphysics of process, on the other hand, unless we are mistaken, has space and time being produced as epiphenomena of 'process'. It seems viable to pull Sellars' insights in the direction of Hegel, or of a neo-Hegelianism, or of a Marxian 'materialist dialectic'. If one does this, then the separation of the processual and the spatio-temporal may begin to look like an unwelcome *opposition*.

[258] Sellars, 'The Soul as Craftsman' in *Philosophical Perspectives. History of Philosophy.* Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1959/2011, 7-17, 17.

[259] Sellars, 'The Structure of Knowledge' in ed. Hector-Neri Castañeda, *Action, Knowledge and Reality: Studies in Honor of Wilfrid Sellars*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merril, 1975, 295-347, §3.

It must be borne in mind before moving on that the word 'physical' as we have used it throughout this prong is *not directly a metaphysical term* but rather a *transcendental* one. For Sellars, while the forms of intuition are precisely mere *forms* – i.e., skeletally transcendental and a priori, in the sense of not directly revelatory of any brute givens – nonetheless 'physical' is the only categorization we have to fall back upon in speaking of the structures which we presume to be given 'through' them or 'in their shape'. If Sellars insists upon the t-dimension being a non-sequential dimension of ordering, through a form of intuition in the sensibility, of 'the *(temporally) simultaneous* constituents of a sensory state […] of the subject'[260], this is on our reading because he is here engaged in the critique of classical metaphysics and is criticizing the idea of a self-standing and transparently intelligible time. There is no substantially or simply given time upon which one could recline as upon a duck-feather eiderdown. Sellars does not have a great deal to say about the temporalities of historical periodization or of ruptural-catastrophic discovery – his primary concern in this line of thinking is to respond critically and creatively (i.e., as a philosopher: without servility) to the advances the natural sciences had made in the twentieth century. As far as we can make out, Einstein is looming large, but perhaps Quantum Mechanics is also. To belligerently insist that there is no 'escape' from time, as we have insisted and would like to continue to insist, is *first of all* to insist that there is no escape from inferential time. The argument then is that nobody ever *experiences* any physical determinations without conceptual mediation through judgement and inference, and that cognitive finitude – the default of a 'God's eye view' – constrains the experiential givenness of overlapping occurrents to the modality of succession.

ii.) However, while Sellars' proposal of a metaphysics of absolute process is proffered transcendentally-dialectically, welcoming any revision or refutation that might come off the back of the discovery of a malfunctioning presupposition found to be lurking within it, it seems that this does not preclude or blunt its proffering as indeed a full-bloodely *metaphysical* proposal, even if a somewhat indirect one. We have glimpsed that the absolute processes in question, insofar as they are absolute – and Sellars' proposal is that they are absolutely absolute – are deprived of temporal successiveness. And we have registered that this metaphysical suggestion fits quite nicely with the thrust of Sellars' enterprise insofar as this enterprise is that of a transcendental critique. Indeed, the *prima facie* contradiction which interests us will be thrown into relief only when we arrive back again at the third spike of our trilemma. For this second spike it is necessary

[260] As already cited above at *supra.* 146-147, FMPP II §131. Our italics.

simply to sketch more positively what Sellars has in mind.[261] Peering through temporal spectacles, we cannot but be ensnared by Sellars' remark that

> Processes, like tragedies, have beginnings, middles and ends. In the case of absolute processes we can speak of *absolute* coming to be and ceasing to be, because when a sounding, e.g., a C#ing, begins, there is nothing which begins – in the relevant sense – to sound. (Compare 'sound' in the sense of 'produces sound'.)
>
> When, on the other hand, a running begins, it is because someone begins to run.[262]

[261] We have been able to identify at least two distinct problems among the motivations for Sellars' proposal. Firstly, the seemingly paradoxical need to maintain a disjunction, and yet also some kind of continuity, between temporalities. And secondly, a question regarding *sensation*: what has latterly been dubbed 'the grain problem'. Solicitous as regards to how best the philosopher might aid the physicist to apply the next determinately negating revisionary torsion that will pierce a hole of new truth into the thus far established knowledge of matter, and following hot on the heels of the entrenchment of the Standard Model of particle physics, Sellars believes himself to have identified a point for forcing in the occurentness of the pinkness of a pink ice cube (cf. Sellars, 'Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man' in *Science, Perception and Reality*, Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1991 [1963], 7-43, 30). The metaphysical presuppositions underlying the Standard Model cannot accommodate certain properties of the occurentness of the counterparts of perceptible colours which must be transcendentally postulated as present in the sensibility (qua the nervous system or otherwise) of the human organism in order to avoid mind-body dualism. Anything blocking monism, cashed out in the regulative ideal of the stereoscopic fusion of the manifest and scientific images of man-in-the-world, is going to be viewed by him as a discursive-categorial malfunction which must be overcome. A path for the answering of the question 'why?' must always be hacked open and cleared. (Sellars is here in agreement with Georg Lukács and also – as we will see later – with Alexandre Koyré.) However, regarding this specific point on sensation, Thomas Metzinger – a transcendental-naturalist 'neurophilosopher' who avails himself of the paradigm of information processing – argues that the property pertaining to the ice cube chiefly of concern for Sellars, the 'ultimate homogeneity' of the counterpart pink colour-constituent in the nervous system, is a red-herring which can be accounted for in computational or information-theoretic terms of data-resolution, or equally on the basis of the principle whereby, in order to produce a determination of reality, instead of no fixable invariancies at all, the functional structure of certain layers of the multi-level apparatus of cognition must necessarily be lost to others, in this case leading to the production of structureless ultra-smoothness as a surface property of phenomenalization (on which see Metzinger, *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*, Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 2003, 189-197). In any case, what we are interested in in this chapter is the Sellarsian absolute processes *insofar as they weigh upon issues regarding time*.

[262] FMPP II §69-70.

Ray Brassier provides a gloss on this:

> 'Pure' or 'absolute' processes are distinguished from 'object-bound' processes in that they cannot be attributed to objects. While running has an attributive status in expressions like 'Socrates runs', thundering is not attributed to anything when we say 'It thunders'. Absolute processes are said to be 'subjectless' insofar as they cannot be attributed to an underlying substratum.[263]

An absolute process is an absolute happening, without anything – any *thing* – which makes it happen. This is what it means to say that it is 'purely' *occurrent.*

> This occurrent aspect is decisive not only because it allows us to conceptualize content qualities independently of any objects that might bear them, but also because it provides us with a paradigm of an absolute occurring; an occurring that is not attributable to something that begins and ceases to occur.[264]

Objects and subjects, patients and agents, in so far as we are capable of determining them – for example, bees – are non-absolute: they are conditioned by the scraps of empirical concepts we have lying around to determine them with, and they are mediated by the objectivating subjectivity which determines them. We hear bees buzzing, and our perception of the buzzing sound is conditioned not only by parameters of aural calibration but also through the conceptualization of the causal and counterfactual properties relevant to its production (what sort of sound is it? what type of animal is making it, and why?). This conceptualization constitutes our *a posteriori* knowledge of bees and their activities. Our capacity to identify and individuate the cause of a *particular* empirical instance of buzzing – in this case, some bees – is modally inflected (through subjunctive conditionals such as '*If* this bee stopped beating its wings, it *would* stop producing a buzzing sound'). However, as Sellars muses,

---

[263] Ray Brassier, 'The Metaphysics of Sensation: Psychological Nominalism and the Reality of Consciousness' in *Wilfrid Sellars, Idealism, and Realism: Understanding Psychological Nominalism*, ed. Patrick J. Reider, London/NY: Bloomsbury, 2017. Page numbers unavailable.

[264] Brassier, *Ibid.*

> what is primary in the various senses of the verb 'to buzz' is the concept of a certain kind of process which can be *identified* in terms of its typical causes. The verb 'to buzz', then, would have a sense in which processes of that intrinsic kind would be buzzings, even when they were not being brought about by one of these typical causes.
>
> Thus, in this sense of the verb 'to buzz' we could say that a buzzing is going on without implying that some object, e.g. a bee, is buzzing.[265]

Once the epistemically-functionally-normatively individuated entities and relations – the empirically given bees and buzzings – have been analytically-speculatively stripped away, the manifest sound is suggested by Sellars to harbour a purely occurrent character as an *absolute* happening. Its character is different in kind from other absolute happenings, such as 'reddings' (which underlie empirically given instances of the colour red), or quarkings.

Importantly – although at this moment it is something of an aside – insofar as he in this precise way relegates empirical determinacies to the negativity of nonsubstantial, merely transcendental identification and individuation, and hence to some kind of illusion or non-being, Sellars – that staunch Kantian – *can* in a way be said to align himself with Hegel and with Hegel's heterodox Platonism (which Gérard Lebrun has noted does not exclude Hegel's heterodox heracleiteanism[266]), and this *in spite of* Sellars' concerted attack upon the ontological hypostatization of abstract entities. We may witness:

> Indeed
>
> There is a rectangular expanse of red over there
>
> would point to
>
> It rectangularly (!) reds over there
>
> [...] We suddenly see that the world we have been constructing is one in which every basic state of affairs is expressed by the use of verbs and adverbs. The idea has fascinating implications. Indeed, we have in

[265] Sellars, FMPP, II, §65-66.

[266] Lebrun, *La patience du concept*, 196-206, 251-261.

> barest outline a truly heracleitean ontology. *Panta rei*. There are no *objects*.
>
> [...] Notice that to agree with Heracleitus that all things flow, nothing abides, is not to agree with the Heracleitus–Protagoras constructed with tongue in check by Plato. For, as we have seen, we are not committed to the absurd view that everything always changes in all respects. There are constancies in the flux.[267]

Invariant forms – 'constancies' – are for Sellars what cognitive determinacies are, and these are *not* classical-metaphysical substances. Indeed, they are 'merely-normed' functionally-transcendentally individuated non-beings.

What we are interested in bringing to the fore in this spike of the trilemma is the necessary link, or non-link, between the type of temporality that is in play – '*absolute* coming to be and ceasing to be' – and the modalities of contingency and necessity, along with those of potentiality and actuality.

Talk of contingency– if it proceeds in an ontological register – will tend often to be intimately married to the attribution of potentiality and to the presupposition of a more or less linear *successional* time. If something is to surprise us by not conforming to the law of necessity to which we had predicted it would conform, allowing us to dub its behavior 'contingent', then

---

[267] FMPP, II, §101-103, and §101. 'All things flow' translates the Heraclitean *panta rei*. It is very interesting to consider the shape 'rectangular' as having as its only metaphysical underpinning an adverbially individuated pattern of happenings. In the context of the philosophy of mathematics, Sellars' Platonism would certainly have to be flagged as highly heteroclite. It is this aspect of his stance which inspired the inclusion at the opening of this study's Introduction of an allusion to constructivism with respect to triangles.

The more help we can get with understanding this idea of a world 'in which every basic state of affairs is expressed by the use of verbs and adverbs' the better, so to consolidate its broad outlines let us quote Johanna Seibt (*Properties as Process: A Synoptic Study of Wilfrid Sellars' Nominalism*, Austin: Ridgeview Digital, 1990, subsection 9.2, page number unavailable):

> Analogously to sounds, all perceptual qualities can be given an interpretation as absolute processes, such that sensibilia would appear to be expressed in observation sentences like 'it hums,' 'it reds rectangularly over here,' 'it smoothes wooden,' employing only a verb-adverb structure instead of adjectival predication. Taking processualized sensibilia as basic entities, Sellars highlights the logical-atomist character of the process-ontological categorial scheme to be developed, in which entities of other categories, manifest objects, state of affairs, and object-bound processes, are to be patterns of absolute processes.

what we are effectively saying is that the thing has displayed a shortfall between its potentiality – what it could have done – and its actuality – what it actually did. The thing *could have* behaved otherwise; something else *could have* happened. Here time is fundamentally entangled with the gap between what things, counterfactually, *could* do, and what they *in fact* do. Linear succession is necessarily presupposed (at least dialectically, or 'Notionally') in order to provide the lag whereby contingency can 'show up' as such by swerving away from a supposed law of necessity – analogously, to speak very roughly, with the case of the Democritean-Epicurean-Lucretian clinamen. Concomitantly, the thing is unavoidably attributed a circumscribed, *limited* halo of potentialities which may well fail to be cashed out. If the thing could do anything at all, the meaningfulness of speaking of the constraint of a nomological necessity would be pulverized and the contrastive distinction of contingency as a deviation from the tracking parameter of this postulated nomological necessity would be vitiated.

Earlier on we glimpsed that a 'hyperkantian' dénouement to this line of enquiry will deny that there is an 'in-itself' of time, such that the noumenon is atemporal. It is clear that this move will also involve saying that the modalities of contingency and necessity are merely transcendental, i.e., non-noumenal. And in fact Sellars here may *in a sense* be said to be hyperkantian, for if his absolute processes occur subjectlessly and objectlessly, then there can be no shortfall of circumscribed potential that would be held back from their actuality: they are fully, one-hundred-per-cent *actual*. Thus, if Sellars' proposal were indeed accepted to be on the money, then, as he puts it '[t]here would, so to speak, be no potentialities *in* basic objects.'[268] However, it is noteworthy that in these lectures we find that Sellars' hyperkantian aspect seems to be tempered with a fat splash of Hegelian tincture: the non-objectal pure occurrences are watertight to any degrees between actuality and mere potentiality, *but they nonetheless still possess a non-successional, non-relational temporality.* The philosophical 'temptation to think of processes as items that in a basic sense have duration – i.e., that continue to exist for stretches of time' is eschewed, *but* this is affirmatively 'as contrasted with continuously coming to be and ceasing to be in the desiderated sense.'[269] We feel compelled to conclude that this situation is symptomatic of Sellars' twin commitments, on the one hand, to stringently attacking mythical givenness, and, on the other, to materialist naturalism or naturalist materialism. There seems to be a point here which one could make by asking a question which we feel is Schellingo-Hegelian, if not Feuerbachian-Marxian: In what way would a realm lacking *all* temporality, and hence all grounds for irreversibility and path-dependency, really be *material*, rather than fulsomely *ideal*?

[268] FMPP, II, §91.

[269] FMPP, II, §127.

iii.) We will state the specification of the final of the three forks briefly. Here we are simply interested in once again underlining the fact of Sellars' commitment to a certain type of materialist monism, *along with* the fact that he pledges allegiance to nominalism with respect to abstract entities. Witness: thought episodes 'are "in" language-using animals as molecular impacts are "in" gases, not as "ghosts" are in "machines"'[270], a statement which gets indirectly fleshed out in the following way:

> [T]he micro-physical processes which take place, according to theory, when salt dissolves in water do not stand to the dissolving as cause to effect. They *are* the dissolving more adequately conceived. The motions of the micro-particles which take place as a cloud moves across the sky do not cause the clouds to move; they *are* the motion of the cloud according to a finer-grained mode of conception.[271]

Equally, from the lecture which has been our main focus in this chapter, please consider: 'The world is an ongoing tissue of goings on'[272], and

> Of course a platonist (or neo-pythagorean) like Quine can always console himself with the idea that ontology as currently conceived is not empty, because there are *abstract* objects – sets, sets of sets, and so on without end. And other ontologists will rejoice in their platonic Forms – the domain of attributes, propositions, and possible worlds without end. But those of us who are nominalists must rethink our conception of the task of ontology if we are to follow the heracleitean path.[273]

2. *Succession contradicting absolute coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be*

Taking stock of the apparent contradiction which has emerged across the three prongs of our apparently inconsistent triad, Sellars appears then to be saying both:

---

[270] Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' in *Science, Perception and Reality*, Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1963, 186-187.

[271] Sellars, *Naturalism and Ontology*, Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1979, 100.

[272] FMPP, II, §103.

[273] FMPP, II, §105-106.

(a) that inferential time is the gateway to constructing those models which may allow new lines to be drawn between manifest appearance and scientific-noumenal reality. Inferring is a doing, and there is such a thing as cognitive progress. In other words, there is an *effective temporality of knowing*. And simultaneously, also

(b) that *what* is known through the building of new scientific models: be this 'nature', or matter qua absolute process – and let us not hesitate to give the screw another turn by emphasizing that this nature is by all accounts identical-in-the-last-instance to the thought which knows it – is not only non-linear but also non-sucessional.

On the face of it, this a contradiction. Is 'absolute process' the same thing as 'nature'? Is there a temporality of nature harbouring irreversibilities which bear upon those of historico-political and desiring time? Presumably natural time must be disjunct from historical temporality, but, then again, materialism would seem to require that there be some kind of continuity. Does a commitment to materialism then entail slipping back into reliance upon a resubstantialized 'fluffy cake' – or, alternatively, ravenous Azathoth – of natural time? We wish to argue that the answer to this question is: No – not even of the level of matter itself. If, as we suggested earlier, causality is a form of mediation – or, in more Sellarsian parlance, if the type of patterns constructed-discovered and studied by physics, chemistry, and biology are to be understood as pertaining to *forms of relation* without isolable atomistic terms – then, we would like to propose, still one can avoid reifying natural time: time will still *not* be a substantial in-itself, *even* if we want to posit some sort of envelopment of politico-historical time within natural time. Indeed, our proposal is that this apparent contradiction in Sellars is not question-begging, but rather, on the contrary, non-trivially symptomatic on the *geistig* level (the level of self-consciousness, that of socially conditioned knowing), and hence *true*.

3. *Death and non-death*

Let us try to further motivate just why this 'true contradiction' deserves to be taken seriously. In order to deepen the interrogation of the problems attendant upon it, we shall frame the Sellarsian contradiction in the context of a broader and (in the order of reasons) more fundamental contradiction, and one which, in fact, hoves into view when one looks at the disagreement holding between Hegel and Heidegger. Here are the two terms of this broader contradiction:

> a) On the one hand, **the desubstantialization of time** – the negation of the illusion that there could be an in-itself of time in separation from the forms of mediation – **is urged upon us by the imperative to refute the false necessity and deceitful apparent self-sufficiency of *any* externally imposed purpose or fate.** Such will always be the stakes whenever a given schematization of time (historical, natural, or phenomenological)

hardens and starts to loom over the independence of practice (which we do not deny is in-the-first-instance merely an in-principle independence, being in-the-first-instance transcendentally empty and merely abstract-formal). This is a Hegelian maxim which retains pride of place among the Marxian materializers of his dialectic. The desubstantialization of time is required in order to dissolve a more profoundly question-begging contradiction entailed by the idea that practice could ever be justified in believing itself to have been cowed into a *metaphysically inevitable* passive docility.

b) On the other hand, and simultaneously, this negation of any would-be simple givenness accruing to time cannot but be married to an acknowledgement that the **epistemic finitude** through recourse to which Kant rejects all transparency between thought and the thing (hitting out at Leibniz and Spinoza, in what has been purported to be a gesture of humility) **is a *real* and *not merely posited* 'cut', an *effective and ontologically necessary* limit.** This *non-posited* opaque withdrawal of a real-objective excess, a latency which is non-identical with respect to the determinately known, is what Heidegger thematizes (and what Laruelle runs with).

Concerning term (b), in order to get the ball rolling here we can note that it is *Fichte* who is perhaps the most illuminating foil and the most helpfully citable of Heidegger's enemies, other than Hegel. Fichte (in diametrical opposition to Schelling) swallowed up the 'excess on the side of the objective' outlined in term (b) by construing all finitude as *merely* (merely!) the transcendental self-limitation of an infinite 'Absolute I'. He thereby enveloped the opaque negative latency, blotting it out 'on the side of the subjective'. Amongst the gains thus procured, in Fichte's eyes, was that of dispensing altogether with the question of the ontological solidity of the object: his 'Not-I' is strictly a function of the 'I's practical act of self-limitation through alterity-positing. For Heidegger, on the contrary – and, we would say, rightly – the separation of intuition from its object, the non-coincidence and non-identity of intuition and object – their non-correspondence – is an *irreducible* separation[274].

[274] Albeit a separation that is not supposed to be an opposition… by Heidegger's own lights, we should expect that to construe this separation as an *opposition* would unacceptably re-reify the object as a substantial term in that opposition, calcifying the *happening* of the cutting of the cut, so to speak. Indeed, in Heidegger this happening cannot be conceptually determined but only *felt* or *resolutely confronted* in existential singularity. We might say that the cut or limit is 'absolute', if we are careful to add that it is *non-conceptually* absolute. Clearly this is a completely different strategy for rejecting the logic of bald bilateral opposition than Hegel's, and yet it would seem to be equally as important for Heidegger to reject this coarse logic as it is for Hegel. As regards objectivity, the Sellarso-Hegelian will complain that in Heidegger, just

On the reading of Jules Vuillemin, however, instead of rendering unto the epistemically finite being that is human *Dasein* the possibility of concrete self-determination through self-construction and self-surpassing, Heidegger – in spite of a promising overture – straightaway allows the dogmatically separated *and opposed* infinite to pop up again. Time, according to Vuilleman's criticism, is resubstantialized as something towards which docility is appropriate or obligatory. It is easy to grasp the thrust of the quibble if one considers that Heideggerian temporalization was first effectuated through the anxiety and reactive resoluteness of being-towards-death, then later in the strife between concealment and unconcealment, to which strife ontic beings owe their 'being'. In his 1954 study of Fichte, Hermann Cohen, and Heidegger, Vuillemin nicely retells this pregnantly instructive story, deploying a fitting dramaturgical floridity, baroque zest, and appropriately stentorian polemical venom, and casting the problem sharply in what is perhaps its most important conceptual context:

> Fichte, Cohen, Heidegger: three stages towards the discovery of a veritable philosophical 'regression', towards Christian Byzantium meeting the irreligion of Ancient Rome. The same conflict of finite and infinite repeats itself. In each case, instead of the philosopher setting out from the relative in order to better ground it in the absolute, the absolute is first suppressed, before, finally, we catch sight of an incredible mystification: everything that happens within finitude – including the negation of the absolute – merely expresses the hidden paths of the infinite. Only, the further our scrutiny advances, as the amplitude of God's negation increases, the more violent and ironic becomes too the revenge of the All-powerful [the *Pantocrator*].
>
> [...] Eventually the barbarous themes of the regression erupt in the anxiety of finitude in Heidegger, who is anguished only by the irony of the *Deus absconditus*. Here at last the Copernican revolution indicates its true significance and carries its royal title written on its crown of thorns. Now we see how occidental philosophy in the course of the nineteenth-

as much as in Fichte, the object has, as a matter of fact, been evaporated – and this certainly cannot be said of Hegel. Indeed, the 'absoluteness' of the separation between cognitive determination and real being in Heidegger – *insofar as* the Sellarso-Hegelian will approve of it – is *not* going to be synonymous with any 'ontological' separation or 'ontological difference'. Our concern in the following few pages is to say why our agreement with Heidegger stretches no further than the thin distance – which is nonetheless crucial – embracing the realness of epistemic finitude.

> century liberated itself from the classical 'passage' and its positive idealization of man in God only to run again desperately into Byzantium's negative theology, the sacred devouring the creatures under the mask of the creatures being liberated from the sacred. Servitude takes the name of freedom and Death triumphs. Not the achievement of classical liberation, but the return to orthodoxy and slavery. Fatality met instead of destiny.[275]

We cannot but agree. In Heidegger the Old Cartesian-Spinozist-Leibnizian 'passage' whereby the relative and the finite complacently, *automatically* traverse their own shoddy compromises and flailing confusions to be redeemed – *quelle surprise !* – in a divine infinity which has been simply presupposed as self-sufficiently metaphysically all-encompassing as well as epistemically self-unveiling, has merely been replaced by a 'displacement' whereby self-conscious creatures are crushed by the equally bogus fake infinities of 'absolute' non-mediated mystified and exoticized alterity and death – a flamboyant case of what we in Chapter 6 saw Hegel dubbing the 'bad', serially deadlocked, infinity. 'Sacred forms in a desacralized universe! Stravinsky here joins Picasso.'[276]

> The origin of this displacement of concepts is to be found in philosophical historiography's own contradiction, when historical interpretation pretends to rediscover the meaning of a *philosophia perennis*, while philosophy – albeit as a prelude to announcing atheism and finitude – can only conceptualize itself with the help of a revelation. The existentialist 'regression' no doubt proclaims a revelation without a content, but a revelation all the same. In Saint Mark's blue shadow Byzantium's hieratic bystanders start to believe themselves to be observing glorious classical mosaics and Tintoretto's glowing figures, when suddenly the resurrection which, to our pleasure and despair, had liberated them from their divine annihilation reminds us that their

[275] Jules Vuilleman, *L'héritage kantien et la révolution copernicienne. Fichte – Cohen – Heidegger*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954, 301. My interposition of the Greek word used in the original.

[276] *Ibid.*

> holiness is ours and that in order to understand them we have had to quit the Reconciliation for the Decimation.[277]

The Sellarso-Hegelian cannot but be sympathetic with Vuillemin's framing of the problem. Indeed, in our study of Hegel's desubstantialization of the infinite in Chapter 6 we were at pains to respond to precisely this dilemma *in its formal-logical shape*. Formally speaking, bridling against the pathos of finitude requires bridling also against its inverse, the pathos of infinitude. However, by the closing of our over-arching argument we hope we will have maneuvered ourselves into a position to be able to propose that, as regards the *concretion of the content* of the problem, it is dialectically necessary to posit with Adorno the intrication of *freedom* (self-determination: the determination of one's own determination; expansion and the New) and what we will allow ourselves the poetic license of following Vuillemin in calling *slavery* (heteronomous servitude; work; the dragging obligation to deal with contingent givens; retrogression). Which is to say: the entanglement of externalization (*Entäusserung* in Hegel and through Marx) and estrangement (*Entfremdung*).

In order to anticipate the contribution to the issue we will seek to gain from Hegel in our next chapter, we can therefore indicate the manner in which the Sellarso-Hegelian trajectory will diverge with that sketched by Vuillemin at the conclusion of his 1954 study.

The atemporal is associated by Vuilleman in the closing pages of *L'héritage kantien* with spurious revelation, whereas he persists in the mission of locating 'originary time', that temporal site which will guard the finite from being crushed by an inflated infinite while still piercing the barrier of creativity. And in his attempt to locate this site he echoes Feuerbach and Marx, putting his finger upon *social practice.*

> [T]he [Kantian] Copernican revolution sacrifices the world to finitude and time only to withdraw philosophy into time's creative eternity, itself atemporal. The history of the displacement of concepts in the interpretation of Kantianism will thus freely illustrate the different ways in which modern philosophy has turned its attention away from thinking the originary time, which is to say the history of humanity, to lose it in a derived time, whether this is conceived with Fichte on the level of the idea, with Cohen on the level of the principle, or with Heidegger on the level of intuition.[278]

---

[277] *Ibid.*, 302.

[278] *Ibid.*, 303. My interposition.

> Does not the veritable existential time spring up there where existentialism no longer expects it: at the junction of temporality and history, of subjective existence and collective becoming; there where the destiny of the deified individual is inserted into humanity and notices that it is from here that it draws its being?[279]

We are entirely in agreement that it is social practices and relations that are the locus of self-transformation, and hence of the mutual injection of finitude and infinity. However, we wish to argue that to proffer them as a solution under the banner of 'originary temporality' *while also berating the atemporal as a mere illusion* will invariably lead to the problematic fetishization and the precipitate naturalization of whatever is supposed to non-mediately index them.

Vuilleman in these passages intimates that Heideggerian intuition, while it masquerades as transcendently-ontologically 'disclosive', is in fact determined by collective practices and relations: it is derived and derivative. We believe that he is right. But what work is the word 'originary' doing here? And what happens to the *intelligibility* of time and the *intelligibility* of the possibility of practically effectuating a good infinity in and through the finite if one *refuses to the concept* its coincidence with atemporal invariancies: with non-time? These questions demand recourse to Hegel.

Why not affirm that yes, *all* temporalities are derived? Why not affirm that all temporalities are inseparable from *modes of mediation*, *including* objective-physical time, which, following Einstein, is relative to and mediated by curved *space* – conceptless exteriority *partes extra partes*, but bent – and, following Hegel, by the relational form of causation for-itself. Concomitantly, if time is never an in-itself, it will be found, further along this track, that one cannot avoid positing the atemporal – the 'eternal' – as the very fibre of the concept. Hegel's take on this question will be something along the following lines. If the atemporal is that which is entirely self-identical and closed-upon-itself, then it is *empty*, as well as integrally intelligible. It is not a substance, nor an infinite plenitude, but rather the intelligible mark of self-negating self-equilibrated negativity, determined through distinguishment from one-sided incompleteness. It is immediacy qua mediated as such – which Hegel will probably not be able to claim to be itself 'creative' – although he may be tempted to try – since he defines it is first of all as *abstract empty*

[279] *Ibid.*, 304.

mediation.[280] The atemporal is, first of all, nothing: pure non-identity, but concretely determined and reflected as such; for *there is no* (mythical) givenness of im-mediate vacuity, nor of non-identity, but only a deduction of them which is at one and the same time conceptual-dialectical (inference: the movement of negativity) and materio-practical (the Act knowing itself, not in a mirror, but by disjunctively rubbing itself cat-like against the scratching-post of resistant-obstructive ideal determinacy).

Furthermore, we wish to argue that there is no synthesis of objective-physical time and historical-practical-social time that would make the former transparent to intellection – or rather, any synthesis will be an epistemically disjunctive one. And crucially, historical-practical-social time is not transparent to itself. Following Marx, the apparent is the intelligible, and the intelligible is mediated by supersensible 'real abstractions'. The content of apparent-intelligible thought-abstraction is systematically distorted by factors to which thought is, in-the-first-instance, blind. Our pursuit in the next and final chapter of our study will be to see if this stance can be prevented from collapsing into chronic pessimism. Pessimism when admissible needs to be coherent – but so does optimism.

The Hegelian desubstantialization of time scatters the presumption of an Absolute Time into multiple, not-simply-given temporalities. The trick then – we would argue – is to avoid resubstantializing this fragmentation itself in a self-flagellating prostration before death, or before

---

[280] It is very interesting that, while Hegel defines the timeless as fully self-mediated and self-relating, equilibrated negativity (the 'Notion'), nonetheless, it seems that he would be obliged to admit of a Notional determination of *dragging one-sidedness as such*.

> The finite is perishable and *temporal* because, unlike the Notion, it is not in its own self total negativity; true, this negativity is immanent in it as its universal essence, but the finite is not adequate to this essence: it is *one-sided*, and consequently it is related to negativity as to the power that dominates it. The Notion, however, in its freely self-existent identity as I = I, is in and for itself absolute negativity and freedom. Time, therefore, has no power over the Notion, nor is the Notion in time or temporal; on the contrary, *it* is the power over time, which is this negativity only *qua* externality. Only the natural, therefore, is subject to time in so far as it is finite; the True, on the other hand, the Idea, Spirit, is *eternal*. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford: OUP, 1970 [1847], §258 *Remark*, 35.)

So, if we are right that there could indeed be a Notion of a *failed eternalization*, do we not see the possibility that the atemporality of the Hegelian negative might be salvaged from the accusation that it serves merely as a guaranteed goldmine of reconciliation?

a dubiously absolutized ‘chaos’, as yet another Mythically Given inflation. Masochistic self-flagellation will perhaps turn out to be unavoidable, but it will need to be put in the right theoretical place, and any inevitability concluded to pertain to it cannot have anything to do with metaphysics or ontology. Death itself needs to be desubstantialized. For Hegel, the lag or shortfall that is seriality and succession is first of all a function of spirit’s obscurity to itself as it stumbles through the externalizations by which alone it can know itself. The discrepancy or *décalage* between ‘natural consciousness’ and observing consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is this character of being wrenched-apart-from-itself which pertains to self-consciousness.

Chapter 8
Contradictions-in-Practice, and Out

1. *The trouble with 'prediction': Quine and Lakatos*

In a series of articles of which an offshoot is a decorously pugilistic correspondence with Sellars, Willard Van Orman Quine proposes that abstract entities such as attributes, rational and irrational numbers, sets, classes, and classes of classes can and should be bestowed with ontological dignity. That is to say, they can and should be viewed as real items in the world, but only *if* they prove to be useful and efficacious in meeting the ordinary needs of natural science. What are these needs? 'As an empiricist I continue to think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool, ultimately, for predicting future experience in the light of past experience.'[281] To give one example from among the mathematical entities, set theory establishes the continuity of the real numbers, and this continuity is required by physics, hence *sets* should be posited as real, even if only in a 'pragmatic' fashion whereby, although they must be thought of as given, so to speak, 'out there in the world' (i.e., as non-constructed), they must also, at the same time, be viewed as a 'convenient myth'[282].

Indeed, physical objects themselves are for Quine merely a useful myth. And yet they are *posited as* irreducible entities, for otherwise how could 'the flux of experience'[283] be rendered navigable? How would its navigability even be possible? A feasible shaping must according to Quine be worked into experience, so that we may gain calculative traction upon the befuddling barrage of sense-experience – and, with varying degrees of success, this has indeed been done. Nonetheless, the difference between neutrinos and Homeric gods is merely a difference of degree, rather than one of kind. Both are cultural posits. Abstracta (abstract entities) such as attributes, sets, classes, and propositions belong equally on this continuum of cultural positing. Suggestions regarding what specific things should be viewed to be real do not differ, with reference to the criterion of pragmatic usefulness, from decisions regarding the ontological status of centaurs, brick houses on Elm Street, or Cantor's Alephs. 'To be assumed as an entity is, purely and simply, to be reckoned as the value of a variable'[284] in an extensional logic undergirded by notions of

[281] W. V. O. Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' in Quine, *From a Logical Point of View: Logico-Philosophical Essays*, NY: Harper & Row, 1963, 20-46, 44.

[282] Quine, 'On What There Is' in Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, 1-19, 18.

[283] Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', 44.

[284] Quine, 'On What There Is', 13.

external reference and representational correspondence, although the external reference of supposed correspondence can never be given independently of the reasoned positing whereby it is posed as real. In the condensed version of the slogan, 'To be is to be the value of a variable.'[285]

Such a quick outline shows that Quine's attribution to the activity of knowing of a *creative* power of *decision* somewhat attenuates the dual worry that his thinking may be *ruinously* lumbered with and contaminated by the very naïve empiricism it is trying to criticize[286], as well as with what the student of Hegel may view as a foolish, Kant-ignoring Tarskian 'truth-functional' theory of existential attribution[287]. Let it be noted furthermore, to his credit, that the epistemic holism he elaborates – expressed in shorthand by the metaphor of the continuum of cultural positing as an 'unbroken web' – allows him to give a pointed and provocative account of the *underdetermination* by empirical evidence of the validity, or otherwise, of scientific theories, not to mention a conception of scientific progress from the mistakes of which lessons can be learnt.

Doing to Carnap something (*very*) roughly analogous to what Hegel and Schelling do to Kant, Quine refutes the discernibility of the distinction between analytically tautologous statements of knowledge and synthetic a posteriori statements of knowledge, and proceeds – here chiming with Sellars, at least fractionally – to affirm that knowing can only be a self-correcting enterprise. Approvingly citing Pierre Duhem[288], Quine judges that the unit of scientific

[285] Quine, 'On What There Is', 15.

[286] In what way could intuition ever have confronted us, set over against us, as a 'chaotic flux'? That would mean that subjectivity is passive in the face of an inertly received sensible matter, and this ignores Hegel, let alone Sellars. A contrivance of exposition, perhaps, if we are to be charitable.

[287] As we will see momentarily, Quine rightly rejects the Mythical-Givenist epistemic atomism that would have the represented object presenting itself in experience independently of the operations of representation so that the determined content construing it could be checked or verified with reference to something objective separated from it. This is a rejection of the epistemic force of simple exteriority and the myth of a transparent im-mediate point of contact between experience and thing. So then why *conjecture* an inaccessible and impossible moment of verification? It looks worryingly like, having lucidly realized that one must go 'beyond the beyond' (refuse non-mediated external authority), Quine has hesitated and opted to subjugate himself to a new flagellating Master henceforth perversely acknowledged as fictional.

[288] The work cited is Duhem's *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, trans. Philip P. Wiener, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982 [1906].

significance is not a logical atom in a term-by-term empiricism (as in Hume and Locke), nor any single statement taken in isolation, but, rather, 'the whole of science'[289].

> The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest laws of atomic physics or even of pure mathematics and logic, is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges. Or, to change the figure, total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience. A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions readjustments in the interior of the field.[290]

The web-field is constituted of statements of beliefs, and the logical laws governing the mutual entailments and incompatibilities of these statements turn out themselves to be further statements included within the same fabric – and just as revisable. Not even the logical law of the excluded middle is immune to revision, and revising it might be a good idea in order to declutter quantum mechanics.[291] However,

> the total field is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to what statements to reevaluate in the light of any single contrary experience. No particular experiences are linked with any particular statements in the interior of the field, except indirectly through considerations of equilibrium affecting the field as a whole.[292]

No individual statement can claim epistemic force in isolation. Rather, the *content* of any statement lies in the logical relations pertaining between it and *every other* statement belonging to scientific knowledge. As in Sellars, an entire battery of concepts is necessary before any one concept can mean anything. Meanings are not first instituted, before then, in a second step, being 'applied' to the world. Rather, the practical *use* of language-expressions is the sole crucible for establishing not only *what* one *means*, but also how one takes things in the world to *be*. Practice

[289] Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', 42.

[290] *Ibid.*

[291] Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', 43.

[292] *Ibid.*

is constitutive of both. And, if the content of a statement is only realized through determining what follows from it inferentially elsewhere in the web – by determining what other claims committing yourself to the claim in question will, by entailment, also commit you to – these entailments will necessarily depend upon *other* collateral commitments in play as 'auxiliary hypotheses'. Sellars pushes this insight in a Kantian direction: the *very essence* of Newton's conception of *mass* is that *force* is necessary and sufficient for *acceleration*.[293] For Sellars, describing cannot be separated from explaining, in that description – as opposed to mere labelling – places objects in a space of counterfactual implications that can be made explicit in the form of subjunctive conditionals. Thus to observe a chunk of iron and surmise the statement that 'The chunk of iron has a mass of 1 kilogram' is tantamount, in so far as it is a candidate for being either true or false, to saying that 'A force of 1 Newton *would* accelerate the chunk of iron at 1 meter/second^2' in the same way that 'That lion is sleeping lightly' is true only under the condition that it is grasped that 'some moderate stimulus (e.g. a sufficiently loud noise, bright light) would wake the lion'.[294] Quine himself would certainly not be happy with this modal articulation of the holistic baseline he shares with Sellars, due to certain Humean hang-ups regarding whether he should allow himself to refer to modality (that is, to the concepts of: necessity – that of natural-physical laws; contingency; and possibility) at all. However, this simply means that Quine will have to (problematically) fall back on a statistical model for understanding how sense can be made of the relation between theory and observation. At the same time, we notice that Quine continues to rely upon a dualism of conceptual scheme (playing the role of 'form') and empirical subject-matter (in the guise of 'content') which will not survive the critique of the Myth of the Given.[295] But these last two points make little difference with respect to what is – in terms of its pertinence to the punchlines we are currently trying to set up – the star player in this story, a star

[293] Cf. Robert Brandom, *Between Saying and Doing*, Oxford: OUP, 2008, 97.

[294] These examples are offered by Dionysias Christias, 'Does Brandom's "Kant-Sellars Thesis about Modality" Undermine Sellars' Scientific Naturalism?' in *Sellars and Contemporary Philosophy*, eds. Pereplyotchik & Barnbaum, NY & London: Routledge, 2017, 183-186, 184-185.

[295] As Donald Davidson writes, agreeing entirely with Hegel – whether he is aware of it or not – the 'dualism of scheme and content, of organizing system and something waiting to be organized, cannot be made intelligible and defensible. It is itself a dogma of empiricism, the third dogma. The third, and perhaps the last, for if we give it up it is not clear that there is anything distinctive left to call empiricism.' (Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', in Davidson, *Enquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, 183-198, 189.) Quine's proposals for the first two dogmas of empiricism, identified in order to be rebuffed by him, were, (1) as we have mentioned, the analytic-synthetic distinction, and (2) Carnap's intra-scientific epistemic-atomist physicalist reductionism.

player which in fact question-beggingly contradicts the scheme-content dualism smuggled in by Quine: empirical underdetermination of theory-bindingness.

Before rapidly reviewing this shining star in Quine's otherwise murky firmament (the glint of decision also excepted, with caveats), it is necessary to pause to obviate a potential misunderstanding concerning our overarching argument. In the previous chapter we argued that Sellars' proposal for a metaphysics of absolute processes rendered illegitimate – in a revisionary (Hegelian) twist on Kant – any talk of the causal modalities (necessity, possibility, and contingency) in metaphysical-physical terms that would seek to determine properties of the thing-in-itself. But now we have introduced the Sellarsian holistic battery of mediating assumptions and entailments – which battery is on his account required so that empirical concepts (such as the concept of a cat) attain any meaningful force at all – in terms of *modally articulated* counterfactuals. On the Sellarsian account, understanding what a cat *is* presupposes understanding that *if* a dog was present, that dog *would* probably bark at the animal under scrutiny – and this implies attributing to the world law-like *modal* properties of (defeasible) necessity and possibility. As our account of the Sellarsian holistic-battery in this chapter is a measuredly approving one, are we thereby contradicting ourselves?

No. The reading of Sellars which we favor takes it that his best insights make him *absolutely not* a 'modal realist' like Leibniz, or like the contemporary natural-scientific positivist, but much rather a post-Kantian 'modal expressivist'. His metaphysics is a metaphysics of the Act and its conditions of effectivity. Saying is a doing and thinking is a doing (although this does not necessarily mean that all doings are sayings or thinkings). For Sellars the modal vocabulary we use to realize the determination of the laws governing counterfactual entailments is a 'pragmatic metavocabulary'[296] for talk about what we are *doing* in *using* linguistic expressions. 'The language of modality is interpreted as a "transposed" language of norms.'[297] Knowing involves saying; indeed, in this context 'saying' is a shorthand for the act of conceptualization, a shorthand which does the job of separating among *all* doings those doings which are conceptualizings[298]. Saying is norm-governed, because otherwise epistemology collapses into the Myth of the Given or reverts to a Spinozist or Whiteheadean self-knowing self-palpating substance. Knowing involves, immanent to its own activity, decisions which draw lines revisably between failure and

[296] Brandom's phrase: see *Between Saying and Doing*, 97.

[297] Sellars, 'Inference and Meaning', 1953, 332.

[298] It can be noted that such a distinction is important for Marx, for whom people tend not to understand what it is that they effectively *do* everyday: exchange commodities.

success, between what should be viewed as illusion and what should be viewed as truth. Thus already at work implicitly in the most quotidian knowledge is an immanently-set standard for sorting judgements which should be viewed as effectively powerful from judgements which should be viewed as ineffectual. What is identified by this standard as *efficacious* knowledge, in order to count as a candidate for this title, must construe patterns in the world ('knowledge' being inconceivable without invariancies of some kind) and attribute relations of ground and consequence among them – that is, it must build a Law or laws of necessity.

Robert Brandom's idea is that modal distinctions are *already operative* in the know-how that is knowing-how to use everyday descriptive vocabulary. Our modal talk is *not* externally slapped onto (*plaqué sur*, as one would say in French) our empirical talk; for Brandom, it does not *add* 'a range of expressive power that is *extraneous* – as though one were adding, say, *culinary* to *nautical* vocabulary'[299], but rather accounts for and elucidates what is already going on there. And crucially, the operativity of the immanent act of standard-setting and revision dividing law from accident is a *transcendental-pragmatic* operativity, and in no way a metaphysically reified one. Hence 'modal *expressivism*': the specific power or activity of conceptualization relevant here aims to unspool – in constructivist fashion – properties inhering in the power or activity of conceptualization itself. None of these are metaphysical properties. What I would like to add to this by way of glancing forward to the interrogations I am aiming to open in this final Chapter of this investigation, is for now simply the observation that *Hegel*, far from objecting to Kant's de-realization of necessity and possibility, continues to abhor the slapdash metaphysical use of these categories. However, he asserts that knowledge is knowledge of the thing-in-itself precisely by focusing on the *effective operativity* (*Wirklichkeit*) of the concept itself.[300]

** ** **

Indeed, concerning this curious type of effectivity, a crucial Hegelian (or, perhaps, revisionary-Hegelian) nuance can here be highlighted, flagging up the worry that Brandom may – in liberal-conciliatory fashion – assume too much transparency, too much mutual givenness, between our talk of effectivity and the effectivity of our talk. We should clock this nuance also in reference to the problem of the *ought*. In the *Logic*, in a lapidary 1832 addition to the comments prefatory to the *Doctrine of Being*'s section on 'Measure', Hegel observes regarding *modality* that

> [i]n [Kant's] transcendental idealism this category has the meaning that it is the connection of the *subject matter* to *thought*. As

[299] Brandom, *Between Saying and Doing*, 98.

> understood by that idealism, thought is as such external to the thing-in-itself. Hence, inasmuch as the other categories have the transcendental determination of belonging only to consciousness, but as *its objective moment*, so modality which is the category of the connection to the subject, possesses the determination of *reflection* in itself in a relative sense, that is to say, the objectivity which is granted to the other categories is lacking in those of modality.[301]

In a footnote Giovanni elucidates that in Kant, as regards judgements determining modality, the object remains an empty externality indicated only at a standoffish distance, and so the 'reflection-into-self' whereby thought would return from the subject matter under consideration into itself, thereby concretizing both the determinacy of the object in its independence for-itself, and its own relation to the object *in effective actuality*, remains merely 'relative' – one-sidedly subjective – and thus without full-blooded truth. Hegel proceeds a few lines later to argue that something analogous holds for Spinoza, who defines the *mode* as

> the affections of substance, or as that which is in another through which it is also comprehended. In this way of conceiving it, this third [i.e., (1) substance, (2) attribute, (3) *mode*; as in Kant (1) quantity, (2) quality, (3) *modality*] is externality as such [...] with Spinoza generally, the rigidity of substance lacks the turning back into itself.[302]

'In Spinozism […] precisely the mode is as such untrue while substance alone is what truly is', and likewise, in what Hegel calls 'Indian pantheism', '[t]he supreme goal of the human being, relegated as he is to the sphere of coming-to-be and passing-away, of modality in general, is to sink into unconsciousness into unity with Brahma, annihilation'[303]. This rumination then flares up into an extremely suggestive dialectical twist to which we will for now simply doff our cap by quoting the text and leaving it hanging with a couple of gnomic promissory notes of interrogative problematization, *including a potential problematization of Hegel's own tendencies*:

> it is nevertheless conceded that in the many all depends on the *how*; but this is to concede that the mode itself essentially belongs to the

[301] Hegel, *Logic*, trans. Giovanni, 282.

[302] *Ibid*., 283. My interposition.

[303] *Ibid*., 284.

> substance of a thing, a very indefinite connection but one which at least implies that the externality of the mode is not all that abstract an externality after all.
>
> Here the mode has the definite meaning of being *measure*. The Spinozistic mode, just like the Indian principle of alteration, is the measureless. The Greeks were aware that *everything has a measure*. Parmenides himself introduces *necessity* after abstract being, as the *ancient limit which is imposed on all.* [...]
>
> Measure in its more developed, more reflected form is necessity. Fate, nemesis, ultimately comes down to a determination of measure. Whatever renders itself *beyond the pale*, becomes too great, too high, is brought down to the other extreme of being reduced to nothing, so that the mean of measure, the medium, is restored. – That the Absolute, God, is the *measure* of all things, is not a stronger statement of pantheism than the definition, 'the Absolute, God, is *being*,' but is infinitely truer. Measure is indeed an external way of things, a more or less, but one which is at the same time reflected into itself, not merely an indifferent and external determinateness but one which exists in itself; thus it is *the concrete truth of being*. For this reason the nations have revered in it the presence of something inviolable and sacred.[304]

'Measure is indeed an external way of things' – so can any necessity at all be made to appear without the external icepick of the *ought*, of a norm? The standard is as such disloyal to the *is*: the standard is non-interiorized. But then, if one defines the 'actual' as 'fully related-to-self' or 'self-identified' (ie., as interiorized in and through difference with its Other), is one not faced with an *effective operativity* of the disloyal icepick which appears to be *non-actual*? Perhaps this is absurd, but if so, if we are not to fall back into the Myth of the Given, will we need to rethink our conception of actuality? And is this not just another way of affirming that there is indeed a gap between the *is* and the *ought*, even if this affirmation does not tell us anything specific about how to narrow it or cash it out?

** ** **

Let us get back to that contention of Quine's which can be viewed as his most important, that point which finds him kicking against what Imre Lakatos calls 'naïve falsificationism'. None

[304] *Ibid*., 284-285.

of his above-summarized commitments in his eyes rule out that one may continue to maintain that the presence of an element called phlogiston explains combustion and rusting, the phlogiston being expended when combustion or rusting take place, *even when* the fact that metals *gain* mass during oxidization is observationally-experimentally established. At least, this can't be ruled out on grounds of logical coherency.

> *Any* statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system. Even a statement very close to the periphery can be held true in the face of recalcitrant experience by pleading hallucination or by amending certain statements of the kind called logical laws.[305]

This is what Lakatos and others have dubbed the 'Duhem-Quine thesis'[306], and Quine must be saluted for having formulated it in stronger terms than did Duhem. The web morphs (for Quine) into Neurath's boat. Having foresworn the idea that one could definitively confirm or falsify any natural-scientific proposition through empirical testing, the forward progress of science becomes an affair of piecemeal self-criticism and auto-(re)construction, with local regions of scientific knowledge being changed 'bit by bit, plank by plank'[307] by a proverbial mariner rebuilding his ship mid-voyage with only the articulation of the conceptual planks for standing on permitting him to stay afloat during the work.

But what exactly is the motor or impetus driving progress here? Quine concurs with those who view 'elegance' and simplicity – conceptual economy qua maximal explanatory power with minimal expended resources of positing – as scientific goals, and he even laconically professes 'a taste for desert landscapes' in matters of ontology[308]. But elegance never suffices alone to motivate the imperative to negatingly surpass anything, and in any given case of an application

---

[305] Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', 43. My italics.

[306] Cf. the long essay Imre Lakatos, 'Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes', in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, eds. Lakatos & Musgrave, Cambridge: CUP, 1970 (page numbers unavailable). Henceforth FMSRP. On this point see the Appendix on 'Popper, Falsificationism and the "Duhem-Quine Thesis"'.

[307] Quine, 'Identity, Ostention, and Hypostasis' in *From a Logical Point of View*, 65-79, 78.

[308] Quine, 'On What There Is', 4. A little bit of historical digging reveals that it would be easy to argue that Duhem is in fact the godfather of this shibboleth of mainstream anglophone philosophy of science.

of Occam's Razor the issue will always turn upon the stated or presupposed super-criterion to which elegance is the secondary means. This is the case *a fortiori* when we are supposed to be gaging elegance across *all* of the sciences, let alone across all of knowledge. For an answer we are sent straight back to Quine's conception of his own brand of 'pragmatism'. Of course, as we have already witnessed, for him the pressure to revise and transform knowledge responds to the standard of 'efficacy in communication [i.e., simplicity] and in prediction.'[309]

Before moving on to look at a certain specific attack launched by Sellars against Quine – one which concerns the status of abstracta – we should dwell upon the quietism implied by Quine's recourse to usefulness in prediction. Usefulness to what end? Predicting what, in order to do what exactly? If we're talking about mere survival, other animal species, especially large predators, are able with varying degrees of success to survive, by all accounts without taking an interest in challenging the geocentric model or inventing String Theory. And the dominance of humans over other animals is a question of cunning know-hows (knowing how to make and use spears and guns) which, again, does nothing at all to motivate the negativity and antagonistic contradiction implied in Darwin shredding Aristotle's presuppositions, Einstein shredding Newton's, or Marx Smith's. It seems that 'usefulness' is destined to spuriously default to nefarious underhand weaponization. Certain types of knowledge are no doubt *useful* for the derivatives trader seeking to insulate the investor's returns, but, if this is the end for which the knowledge in question is required as means, then what's stopping the trader in pursuit of this end from trying to hoodwink as many people as possible into believing that Hayek and Freidman are right in asserting that there can be no other ends? Clearly nothing is stopping this, save the trader's own standard-setting, but if you are going to hoodwink others or yourself into believing such an entrapment of ends, you will need to assume a positivist-empiricist philosophical framework which surreptitiously presupposes that a number of 'facts' are simply-Given, rather than having been constructed and produced, and hence you will need to implicitly deny the role of negativity. Quine's urbane and pooh-poohing tranquility is bought at the price of a politically disastrous subservience to the Myth of the Given (which we will presently more rigorously demonstrate through recourse to Sellars). Quine wants to pay homage to the imperative to revise and transform knowledge, but in doing so the only way he can remain unruffled is by Absolutizing relative interests and partial desires themselves, and this leaves him with a certain *docility*.

Calculating technical tactics for interests and desires circumscribed and determined by the commodity-form and the extraction by capital of surplus-value – Is this really the destiny of the Science of Nature?! On the level of actual institutional practice it might well sooner or later end up being so – but that one may *know*, as we do, that this particular subordination of means to

[309] Quine, 'Identity, Ostention, and Hypostasis', 79. Interposition mine.

ends is *not metaphysically necessary* already shows that Knowing, on the contrary, is the movement of an uncircumscribed self-relating negativity. Indeed, we move somewhat closer to the Schellingian motherload and Hegelian paydirt, allowing us to clarify what the real as opposed to false philosophical-critical problems here are, if we pay attention to Lakatos's intervention regarding how best to cash out the (welcome) Duhem-Quine thesis. Lakatos proposes a 'sophisticated falsificationism' which, it seems to me, stands quite a good chance of making it past the razor of the critique of the Myth of the Given.

If we reject vulgar 'usefulness', what criterion could allow us to identify and discern any particular proposal wishing to qualify as knowledge as '*wrong*'? Lakatos writes that the problem is

> *not* when we should stick to a '*theory*' in the face of '*known facts*' and when the other way round. The problem is *not* what to do when 'theories' clash with 'facts'. [...] Whether a proposition is a '*fact*' or a '*theory*' in the context of a test-situation depends on our methodological decision. [...] [T]he clash is not 'between theories and facts' but between two high-level theories: between an *interpretative theory* to provide the facts and an *explanatory theory* to explain them [...] The problem is how to repair an *inconsistency* between the 'explanatory theory' under test and the – explicit or hidden – 'interpretative' theories; or if you wish, *the problem is which theory to consider as the interpretative one which provides the 'hard' facts and which the explanatory one which 'tentatively' explains them.*
>
> [...] This argument alone would be enough to show the correctness of the conclusion, which we drew from a different earlier argument, that experiments do not simply overthrow theories, that no theory forbids a state of affairs specifiable in advance. It is not that we propose a theory and Nature may shout NO; rather, we propose a maze of theories, and Nature may shout INCONSISTENT.[310]

Facts themselves are constructed or produced rather than simply given. (Although this does not mean that one can simply decide what the facts are. The interpretative theory must itself respond to standards of coherency and determinacy – of determinate negation. Marx has to start with Smith and Ricardo in order to determine what the relations of production in fact are.) Very

[310] Lakatos, FMSRP, Section 2c.

well. But, again – that old chestnut – what is the criterion of success guiding this creative production of inconsistencies? Lakatos tells us that sophisticated falsificationism

> shifts the problem of how to appraise *theories* to the problem of how to appraise *series of theories*. Not an isolated *theory*, but only a series of theories can be said to be scientific or unscientific: to apply the term 'scientific' to one *single* theory is a category mistake.
>
> The time-honoured empirical criterion for a satisfactory theory was agreement with the observed facts. Our empirical criterion for a series of theories is that it should produce new facts.[311]

Science has to strive to *produce novel facts.* Against verificationist hesitancy and stick-in-the-mud crude falsificationism, this is (or ought to be) a gung-ho, barnstorming affair. Creative flair is the furnace of theory-making.

> The sophisticated falsificationist allows *any* part of the body of science to be replaced *but* only on the condition that it is replaced in a 'progressive' way, so that the replacement successfully anticipates novel facts. [...] The direction of science is determined primarily by human creative imagination and not by the universe of facts which surrounds us. Creative imagination is likely to find corroborating novel evidence even for the most 'absurd' programme, if the search has sufficient drive. [...]
>
> The *dogmatic* falsificationist will throw up his hands in horror at this approach. [...] He will accuse the sophisticated falsificationist of building arbitrary Procrustean pigeon hole systems and forcing the facts into them. He may even brand it a revival of the unholy irrationalist alliance of James's crude pragmatism and of Bergson's voluntarism, triumphantly vanquished by Russel and Stebbing. But our sophisticated falsificationism combines 'instrumentalism' (or 'conventionalism') with a strong empiricist requirement, which neither medieval 'saviours of phenomena' like Bellarmino, nor pragmatists like Quine and Bergsonians like Le Roy, had appreciated: the Leibnitz-Whewell-Popper requirement that *the – well-planned – building of pigeon holes must proceed much faster than the recording of facts which are to be housed in them*.[312]

[311] Lakatos, FMSRP, Section 2c.

[312] Lakatos, FMSRP, 'Appendix: Popper, Falsificationism and the "Duhem-Quine Thesis".'

Lakatos, in our assessment, is better placed to cash out the Duhem-Quine thesis than was Quine himself to the precise extent that in his account *the newness of the facts (the novelty of the empirical determinacies) produced by science can be its criterion of success only insofar as this goal is openly acknowledged (or acknowledgeable without subreption) as Absolute and not relativizable*. If Lakatos were to allow novelty to be relativized, the whole thrust of his argument would be derailed. He is clear that Duhem's own recourse to simplicity is vitiated by its fatal relativisability, in that it leaves too much leeway open to 'taste and fashion'[313] – and by asking 'Simplicity to what end?' we can easily substitute 'taste and fashion' with 'opportunistic partiality confusing means with ends'. The question which then springs up is that as to whether Lakatos has in his essay indeed furnished himself with the means to remain consistent on this point. To 'create a new fact' is to have a novel prediction in some way corroborated (which does not mean the same thing as 'verified', a term undermined by its constitutive distinction from a vulgar-naïve conception of the term 'falsify') upon using the theory which predicted the fact as a lens allowing the world to be explored and 'prodded' in a way in which it could not be before the theory was elaborated. But this doesn't tell us how the creation of new pigeon-hole assemblages (theories) is supposed to proceed, and this is an activity which happens *before* the laborious and no doubt byzantine quest for confirming (corroborating) evidence in the world has even started.

Bizarrely enough, given his uncompromising vigilance and stunning unimpressedness with all-too-convenient easy solutions, there is room to worry that Lakatos may risk *aestheticizing* theory-construction. He rightly emphasizes that it is reactionary to swat away, as dilettantish, a 'brilliant' if eccentric upstart group of scientists who have conjured up an *outré* fresh natural-scientific conjecture, just because it will probably take them a long time to find any corroborating new facts for it. But how does one spot 'brilliance'? Presumably not simply where the new theoretical creation is aesthetically pleasing. (We will touch on another issue related to this one later.) Lakatos gives a nod to Hegel, 'that great foe of "immediacy"' (Sellars[314]), when he writes that 'rationality works much slower than most people tend to think, and, even then, fallibly. Minerva's owl flies at dusk.'[315] But what is worrying is the creeping reentry of givenness taken-

---

[313] Lakatos, FMSRP, Section 2c.

[314] Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', 129.

[315] Lakatos, FMSRP, Section 3d4. In the post-war period Lakatos attended the Hegelian Marxist Georg Lukács' seminar. He was also a member of the Hungarian communist party, a politics which would soon wane.

to-be essential to scientificity (or truth per se) in and through the idea that sooner or later *more and more* new facts will need to be produced by a research programme if it is not to be dismissed. Importantly, we here find ourselves faced with what we earlier, in relation to artistic innovation in music, called the 'Problem of Novelty'. Simply demanding more and more novelty is a merely quantitative exigency which, as such, will be found to be stuck in an endless monotonous bad infinity; which today will tend to play into the hands of neoliberal managerial 'optimization'; and which is dubious as to whether it has even properly determined what 'novelty' is in the first place. Novelty cannot be an indiscriminately indeterminate negation of the old (which, qua indifferent, would make it – novelty – quantifiable). As argued earlier, this is what capital determines us to desire. Furthermore, it is disappointing that Lakatos allows his 'requirement of continuous growth' to sprawl flabbily and spill into the following confusion:

> [I]t [the requirement of continuous growth] shows up the weakness of programmes which, like Marxism or Freudism, are, no doubt, 'unified', which give a major sketch of the sort of auxiliary theories they are going to use in absorbing anomalies, but which unfailingly devise their actual auxiliary theories in the wake of facts without, at the same time, anticipating others. (What *novel* fact has Marxism *predicted* since, say, 1917?)[316]

Many things have gone wrong in this passage, including a reificatory fetishization of production such as attacked by Marx himself, lazy straw-manning, and a confusion of cognitive creativity, if not of scientificity itself, with what I will content myself for now with insulting as a Whiggish continuist attempt to unfold the future out of the present mendaciously presupposing reconciliation on all fronts, renouncing critique, and directly contradicting the recourse to the owl of Minerva. Marxism and Freudianism are not about *what is* but rather, respectively, about what *ought to be* and what *ought not to be*, and they do not concern nature but rather the social conditions of self-conscious knowledge and the effects occurring when knowledge starts to know itself. What is ultimately the *clumsy* holism of Duhem-Quine in this moment becomes embarrassing: Why are we failing to distinguish between different types of theory?

Nature is different from Spirit in that Spirit creates its own freedom just as much as it creates its own bondage in estranging itself from itself, whereas nature does not 'create' anything: to maintain otherwise is anthropomorphism. Nature-in-itself is completely indifferent to the distinction between creation and destruction. Spirit is defined by Hegel as self-conscious

---

[316] *Ibid.* My interposition.

knowledge. It is Spirit which constructs and knows nature in the natural sciences – rather than it being nature constructing and knowing itself – precisely because the activity of Knowing cannot be determined by anything outside of itself, while there can be no transparent im-mediate appearance of nature. Thus Nature will be defined as the realm of total heteronmony – whence *die Ohnmacht der Natur*, 'the *impotence* of nature'[317], blades of grass bent by the breeze without sprouting their own spontaneity, externalities imposing upon externalities – while Spirit will be defined as the realm wherein heteronomy and self-determination are entangled, at least *in potentia*. Historical temporality cannot be directly projected onto nature-in-itself, and, much more strongly, *nor can the modalities of possibility and potentiality* (this would be anthropomorphic). We suggest then that Lakatos' continued inflation of 'prediction' confuses nature's heteronomy and exteriority-to-self with the historical temporality proper to Spirit's self-estrangement, a temporality entwined constitutively with its own capacity for autonomy. Natural-scientific corroboration should *not* be understood as *prediction*, because this a procedure foreign to nature-itself. The flip-side of this erroneous coin will be that of confusing the theory of the qualitative phases of Spirit's self-consciously relating itself to itself with a grindingly rigid, and second-guessable, 'production' or efflorescence which is also indistinguishable from a Spinozist emanation.[318] Natural-scientific corroboration should be understood *all the way down* as a moment of Spirit's relating-of-itself-to-itself by surpassing itself – but a moment of creativity which is peculiar in that the new patterns it elaborates (on the levels both of the interpretative theory and of the explanatory theory) must proceed under the Law of absolute heteronomy. Such is an attempt to hold Lakatos to his own standards regarding the *qualitative* nature of logical inconsistency.

2. *The discontinuity in Quine's continuum*

We come to Sellars' objection to Quine, an objection which concerns the naïve 'Platonism' whereby Quine posits not only physical entities such as positrons but also abstract entities such as 'attributes, classes, classes of classes, numbers, propositions etc.'[319] as

---

[317] Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, 23.

[318] Marx is of the view that

> the concrete subject of our thought, is in fact a product of thought, of comprehension; not, however, in the sense of a product of a self-emanating conception which works outside of and stands above observation and imagination, but of a conceptual working-over of observation and imagination. (Marx, *Grundrisse*, excerpted in ed. McLellen, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 387.)

[319] Sellars, *Naturalism and Ontology: The John Dewey Lectures for 1974*, Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1996 [1979], 11.

substantially 'out there in the world' in a *separation* from the act of their construction by the knowers who know them, and supposedly preceding that act.

Sellars writes to Quine in a letter: 'I simply do not see how to fit platonic objects (classes and sets) into a naturalistic framework. Bluntly put: If sets are basic objects, how does the mind get in touch with them?'[320] Quine has said, plying his extensional model of reference and correspondence-through-usefulness theory of true representing, that the bearers of reference are variables of quantification (that is, of existential attribution), i.e., 'in traditional terms that "something" is the bearer of reference.'[321] But Sellars wants more details about how exactly knowers are supposed to go about grasping the 'somethings' that are supposed to be real and distinguishing them from 'somethings' that have been arbitrarily concocted. (In mathematics an arbitrarily concocted something would be a set of all sets, which has been proven to be paradoxical, or, in knot-theory, a closed loop of one-dimensional string in four-dimensional space which is also a knot, which equally has been shown to be logically inconsistent.) Sellars demands that taking the 'something' as an *external* bearer of reference simply be taken seriously, 'which, as I see it, involves at least sketching an account of *how* "variables of quantification" hook up with the world.'[322] Sellars is chary as to the idea that the world-in-itself could be said to possess any structure that could be said to be categorial, and if for the sake of argument he were to assume that it did, he would reject outright the idea that this structure might imprint itself on the mind as a seal is imprinted on melted wax. But this does not stop him from accepting that, regarding physics and the empirical natural sciences, something is indeed happening at the moment of experimental corroboration that pertains to a *causal* (non-logical or 'matter-of-factual', as he likes to put it) connection between, say, electrons or quarks and what is perceptible to the observing person in the experimental scenario. As this acceptation results from a reasoning-by-the-absurd it is appropriate to use the loose locution 'hook up' for this general sort of connection. If Quine wants sets, knots and four-dimensional unknots, attributes and propositions to be positable as separable, non-practically-mediated substance-objects, will he not have to recognize *causal*, matter-of-factual relations between these abstracta and whoever is grasping or comprehending them?

---

[320] Sellars, Letter to W. V. O. Quine, 28 March, 1978, cited by Richard Van Barriger, 'Sellars and Quine on Abstracta in Scientific Ontology', *Res Cogitans*, 7:1, 2016, 46-51, 47.

[321] Sellars, *Naturalism and Ontology*, 10.

[322] *Ibid.*

The naïve Platonist can here be expected to reach for the Duhemian strategy and claim that, while any particular observation-sentence corroborating the Higgs boson, or any particular emotive touchy-feely 'awareness' that a tesseract might indeed possess the character of obstacle-resistance that would make it a self-sufficient substance, are mere fragmentary crumbs or bone-splinters of a vastly broader organically intertwined theory-whole. The strategy will be to say that it is only the theory-web-field itself which can be viewed, holistically, as having the relations or isomorphisms *it* articulates corroborated when it is confronted with 'the tribunal of experience': such will be the construal of the hook up. If quarks and electrons can be corroborated via sensory stimulation, and if propositions and classes must be real in order to render intelligible the realness of quarks and positrons, then both types of entity will be posited as things-in-themselves, the difference being merely a question of 'degrees of theoreticity' or of remoteness from the sensory periphery.[323]

Sellars is nonplussed by this reply, calling it a 'facile gambit'[324]. He admits that, on the face of it, in the case of physics etc. (in the case of the empirical natural sciences) the proposal that the theory-whole can only be applied *as a whole* may be workable.[325] After all, it is arguably not a massive stretch to accept that physical theorization is, per se, theorization about causality. So it can be granted that

> [t]he theory-whole has specific things to say about the causal relations which connect micro-physical objects with the sensory stimulations which bombard the sensory surfaces of experimenters looking at bubble chambers and photographic plates. The theory explains *how* we are in touch with micro-physical objects.
>
> Thus, in addition to the Duhemian point that *expressions* for micro-physical particles acquire a hook-up with micro-physical particles by virtue of belonging to a theory which is applied as a whole, the theory offers a causal account of the *specifics* of the hook-up.[326]

[323] Sellars, *Naturalism and Ontology*, 10.

[324] *Ibid.*

[325] Although I assume it is taken for granted that Sellars would give the details of this proposal some drastic tweaks – since his holism is, at its best, a *holism of self-opaque malfunctions, rifts, and contradictions* – such that his concession to the Duhemian gambit is slightly tongue-in-cheek.

[326] Sellars, *Naturalism and Ontology*, 13.

However, crucially,

> [t]his is not the case with such terms as 'number,' 'class,' 'attribute,' and 'proposition.' This fact introduces a radical discontinuity into Quine's Continuum, one which has important consequences for the problem of abstract entities, for ontology and, above all, for the philosophy of mind.[327]

What would it mean to claim that classes or sets 'causally affect' the sensibility of the person aware of them? Would one have to construe them as spatio-temporal entities? The claim is absurd.

The gravity of the situation is thrown into relief when we consider the abstract entity that is the *attribute.* In 'The cat is ginger', 'ginger' is the attribute – it is a property predicated of the cat. Attributes are universals: *this* singular cat *here* is not the only thing in the world that is ginger (Lois from *Family Guy*'s hair, for example, is also ginger), hence ginger is not a particular but is predicable of many different particulars: 'ginger' is a universal. In 'The coffee is hot and sweet-tasting' the attributes 'hot' and 'sweet-tasting' are both universals.

Hegel and Sellars will agree that universals are abstract entities (even if the question of their respective strategies for conceiving of the type of 'concreteness' accruing to particulars is tricky). And we ask the reader to bear in mind that, starting with Laruelle in Chapter 2, we have argued that there is no yardstick for verificationally telling the concrete from the abstract. Indeed, properties insofar as we are capable of predicating them of objects in speech or thought are abstract entities. To slice a radical discontinuity into Quine's continuum is therefore, I argue, to make erupt an obsidian volcano of Hegelian negativity which liquidates *any* moment of verification wanting to 'check' that a judgement 'corresponds' to (resembles or isomorphically bijects with) another determination which would be simply-given independently of the mediating determinative operations of judgements. The correspondence-theory of truth – whether by resemblance or 'usefulness' – is gutted by this opacity. We individuate things by predicating properties of them, but we do not have the right to say that these properties are substantial in separation from the act whereby we predicate them of things (*quid juris*?).

Will this conclusion not lead to the chronic pessimism (or rather, quietism; pessimism would be a judgement too far) of Pyrrhonic skepticism? Not according to Hegel, for however wrong (erroneous in the sense of *ineffectual*) we are, according to him we are ourselves *not*

[327] *Ibid.*

separate from the things-in-themselves. We are jammed inescapably in a practical congress with the things-in-themselves, and hence from wrongness can sprout truth.

> The inequality which takes place in consciousness between the I and the substance which is its object is their difference, the *negative* itself. It can be viewed as the *defect* of the two, but it is their very soul or is what moves them. This is why certain ancients conceived of the *void* as what moved things in conceiving of what moves things as the *negative*, but they did not yet grasp this negative as the self. – However much this negative now appears as the inequality between the I and the object, still it is just as much the inequality of the substance with itself. What seems to take place outside of the substance, to be an activity directed against it, is its own doing, and substance shows that it is essentially subject.[328]

The thrust here – while Hegel may be standing on his shoulders – is intended *against Spinoza*. Our effort now is to further explore how – and *if* – such a declaration can be rescued from the charge that it will collapse into a complacent Panglossian theodicy.

3. *Sellarsian 'picturing' and functional-role semantics*

For Sellars, universals are not substances that would be separable from patterns of linguistic actions. Further, the form of the proposition must not be hypostatized and projected into nature. '[P]ace Wittgenstein, the extra-linguistic domain consists of *objects, not facts*. To put it bluntly, propositional form belongs only in the linguistic and conceptual orders.'[329] Claiming that nature has a structure that is inherently mathematical would be Pythagoreanism, and claiming that it conveniently has a propositionally exhaustible structure would be a pre-Kantian logicism presupposing a pre-established harmony between the natural order and the conceptual order. Frege's logic had replaced subjects and predicates with functions and arguments, and Sellars follows suit (with a twist) by proposing a *semantics* of *functional role*. He attacks any supposed self-standing substantiality of predicates: they don't pick out 'real' properties; in their use they are merely normed non-beings which simply guide *the practice of speech*. This is promising from the point of view of materialist monism because one can then, and as Sellars proceeds to do – in a sense to be carefully qualified – 'melt' the graphic mark or sonorous eructation *from* the function

[328] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. & ed. Pinkard, 23.

[329] Sellars, *Naturalism and Ontology*, 61-62.

of signifying *back into* the isomorphy-plotting neurophysiological or Kantian-imagination-schematizing apparatus of 'picturing'.

Sellars thus subscribes to a certain type of nominalism; to be specific, he subscribes to a 'metalinguistic' nominalism. Let us look at both struts of this metalinguistic nominalism – the theory of picturing and the functional role semantics. The rationale for studying these offerings of Sellars's here is that doing so allows us to witness in sharp focus a certain facet of the problem of the gap between the *ought* and the *is*.

Regarding picturing, Sellars starts with a creative critical reading of Wittgenstein's contention in the *Tractatus* that statements which are contentful and truthful are the 'logical pictures' of facts[330]. Showing the utmost charity to Wittgenstein, Sellars modifies the latter's contention by scrapping the idea that *what* is pictured in any instance of picturing could be a *fact*. If a score of musical notation can be said to 'picture' the symphony we listen to, and if the shapes of the grooves on the gramophone record can also be said to do so, then it will be acceptable to say that the projection going from the score to the audible symphony, or from the vinyl indentations to it, is one of 'resemblance' or 'likeness', in the precise sense that rules of transformation or transcoding can be established to calibrate the cross-schematization which derives the symphony from the score or maps it onto the shapes cut into the plastic.[331] However, this only takes us so far. We perceive the score and the record-grooves – both items which have been fabricated by humans – through intuitions of them, with the help of some kind of microscope in the latter case. But as we have seen, intuitions themselves already have propositional-grammatical form, for they are always seeings-*as*, hearings-*as*, etc. What a score is like, what a series of plastic grooves is like, what a symphony is like: these all have the status of *facts*. They are all linguistically-conceptually shaped. But for Sellars, pace Wittgenstein, there *are no* extra- or non-linguistic 'facts' *whatsoever*. And a fact which pictures another fact is merely an intra-linguistic translation which does not tell us anything at all about the relation between linguistic statements and nonlinguistic reality. Such a relation is what interests Sellars, as he views the 'thoroughgoing linguistic idealism' for which the world consists of linguistic facts as a 'miserable absurdity'[332], and shows generosity in refraining from reducing Wittgenstein's intentions to it. Rather, he looks to paragraph 3.1432 of the *Tractatus* and extracts from it the crucial insight that

---

[330] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. Pears & McGuinness, London/NY: Routledge, 2001 [1921], 4.03.

[331] Cf. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.011-4.0141.

[332] Sellars, 'Truth and Correspondence', in Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality*, 195-222, 208.

'We can *only* say that aRb [that a stands in a certain relation to b] by placing the names "a" and "b" in a certain conventional dyadic relation'[333]. The stress is thus put on the *inscription* itself or the *sonorous utterance* itself insofar as these are *themselves* arrangements, patterns of spatio-temporal particulars. Sellars is asking us to pay attention to the fact that propositions which have the inferentially-normatively articulated role of *signifying* (of meaningfully describing situations such as to entail or exclude certain counterfactual subjunctive conditionals, of codifying principles of inference or action, or expressing desires or intentions) are always *also and at the same time* concatenations of meaningless *sign-designs* – graphic or sonorous *objects* – possessed of certain perceptible characteristics, which is to say of empirically determinate properties.[334]

Let's keep in mind that Sellars is working towards debunking the idea that predicable attributes such as *being-coloured-'orange'* are metaphysically independent entities, properties ontologically hardened and self-standing in separation from speech or from the act of predication, such as would open the way to 'orangeness' being a *substantial* Universal which particular orange things would *exemplify* or in which they would 'participate'. In the sentence 'The cat is orange', '*is orange*' is the predicate. There is a dyadic relation between subject and predicate. In the sentence 'Chicago is larger than Chipping Norton', the relation is of the nature of a certain type of comparison between two objects, regarding size, and the expression which states the dyadic relational magnitude-comparison is '*is larger than*'. Sellars' goal is to suggest how the *functional role* of empirical predicates and relational expressions might be explanatorily reconstructed in order to save them from being hypostatized and frozen as abstract *entities*.

---

[333] Sellars, *Naturalism and Ontology*, 49.

[334] It is helpful to quote the Tractarian paragraph that has inspired Sellars together with the one immediately preceding it:

> 3.1431 The essence of a propositional sign is very clearly seen if we imagine one composed of spatial objects (such as tables, chairs, and books) instead of written signs.
>
> Then the spatial arrangement of these things will express the sense of the proposition.
>
> 3.1432 Instead of, 'The complex sign "*aRb*" says that *a* stands to *b* in the relation *R*', we ought to put, '*That* "*a*" stands to "*b*" in a certain relation says *that aRb*.'

The emphasis is on the need to 'quote' '*a*' and '*b*' using 'scare quotes' – '…' – in order to show that these are tokenings of sign-designs distinguishable because, *as graphic marks on the page* they are *shaped* differently, and linearly concatenated with each other with an '*R*' in the middle.

‘Chicago is larger than Chipping Norton’ can be expressed as ‘aRb’. ‘aRb’ is an inscription in which the expressions ‘a’ and ‘b’, qua signifying, are *names*, while the expression ‘R’, qua signifying, is the predicative role-player. In this case ‘R’ says that ‘a’ and ‘b’ are related *in a certain way*, *somehow*[335]. Sellars conjectures and starts to build a language in which *all predicative expressions are gotten rid of* as surplus to requirements[336]. The graphic properties of the writing of the names can be made to state what the predicate states. Thus

a

b

can be used to state that ‘a is larger than b’ without using the expression ‘is larger than’, if we simply establish that the convention for showing superiority in capaciousness is to inscribe the greater term above the lesser. But, as Sellars is at pains to underline, it is ‘absolutely crucial’[337] to grasp that *nothing* in this ecomonically decluttered inscription is playing the role that ‘is larger than’ was taken to be playing when we were relying upon linear concatenation and auxiliary symbols of the like of this extirpated ‘is larger than’. Indeed, Sellars’s claim is the very strong one that, with reference to the ideal of this maximally ‘perspicuous’ language (i.e., with reference to this language which would be maximally cleared of elements which might lead to us tending to confuse them with metaphysical substances), ‘not only are predicative *expressions* dispensible, but the very *function* performed by predicates is dispensible.’[338]

To take another example, one could express the sentence ‘x is green’ by writing the name ‘x’ in boldface, it being established that this shows the property of being green, thus[339]:

x

---

[335] Cf. Sellars, ‘Naming and Saying’, in Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality*, 223-245, 224.

[336] He calls this language Jumblese, ascribing it to the Jumblies of Edward Lear’s nonsense poem.

[337] Sellars, *Naturalism and Ontology*, 50.

[338] Sellars, *Naturalism and Ontology*, 51.

[339] Sellars, ‘Naming and Saying’, 230.

It is the *manner* in which the name is written which shows its characteristic (greenness), giving the inscription a 'characterizing' function. However, there are many different characteristics, and different *types* of characteristics, a thing can have, just as there are many different ways in which two things can be related, or different *types* of relation. Something can be larger than something else (size), something can be redder than something else (intensity or coverage of colour). How to express this variety while sticking to incorporating it into '*manners of being names, as, in a literal sense, internal features of the names*'[340]? One could come up with a variety of different styles of writing names. Capitals can be used, different fonts (a particularly jagged and angular font, for example, or a squiggly one); letters can be written bigger than other tokenings of the same letter to allow it to be shown that different types of quality are being attributed accumulatively to a non-varying name; different *types* of dyadic relations between two names may be encoded into the *distances of gap* left between pairs of letter-names.[341]

Clearly, writing statements in this language will rapidly become a massively complex affair. But Jumblese is in no way an otiose thought-experiment. Rather its elaboration is a naturalist and materialist attack against the vulgar Platonism which would have it that '*a* [a given triangle] is triangular' should be unpacked as '*a exemplifies* triangularity' where 'triangularity' is taken to be a universal separated from linguistic-inferential *practice*. Universals are dissolved by Sellars into *patterns* of function which, strikingly, are expressible or determinable in *perceptible* sign-designs and their concatenations: what is expressed in these predicateless sign-designs of sign-designs is '*uniformities of performance*'[342]: patterns of utterance, of *doing*. In so far as picturing maps it, this doing is non-semantic, which is to say that picturing only pictures spatio-temporal, physical, 'matter-of-factual' qualities and relations which are *meaningless*. Picturing inscribes uniformities of action which are eviscerated of all semantic aspect, even if they are identical-in-the-last-instance with a flattened snapshot of meaning-making, *in which all of the represented contents of the acts of representing have been removed – we recall that represented contents are constituted through counterfactual webs of inferential delirium regarding relations between entities and events which speech is <u>about</u>, <u>without</u> presenting any of them in a diaphanous Parousia* – leaving only the perceptible determinations of the speech, or writing, itself. And one is loath to confuse perceptible spatio-temporal determinations and their qualities (jagged, squiggly, loud, quiet) with properties of physical-metaphysical substances-in-themselves. This last point is the same issue as that of the Kantian schematism. Sellars stresses that perceptible-

[340] Sellars, 'Naming and Saying', 237.

[341] Sellars, 'Naming and Saying', 232-233.

[342] Sellars, 'Truth and Correspondence', 214; my italics.

intuitable objects, however starkly geometrical and threadbare they are (and, conversely, however much one wants to view the constraining material of affection as neurophysiologically supplied, and notwithstanding the fact that they themselves *are* natural objects), *insofar as we are capable of conditionally perceiving them*, *can indeed* be viewed as mapping with other natural objects (or for that matter, with *themselves*, as they really are in themselves, physico-materially), *but only* to the tune of a 'second-order isomorphism'. Against Wittgenstein, a better metaphor than that of the grooves of the gramophone record is that of the digital strings of zeros and ones encoded in a CD. The transcoding of determinacies between the physical things such as we do not perceive them but such as they are and physical things such as we do perceive them but such as they are not is complex and entirely opaque to us.

This brings us to an important problem-crux. Picturing tells us that, in perceiving a scribble or splash of ink, or for that matter any visible shape or audible sound or haptic touch, we *are* directly perceiving a natural object, in that the conditioning of the specificities of the determinacy we perceive is constrained, enabled, and shaped by patterns of practical acts of determining and representing, acts-in-nature. But it would be a desperately vulgar attempt at materialism to want to conclude that indulging in picturing teaches us anything at all about the way things are. In fact, against Wittgenstein, it teaches us *nothing at all* about the way things are, save the negative result that universals and predicates are *not* classical-metaphysical substances. It does not even tell us anything determinate about *what we are doing* when we engage in an act of, for example, representing a ginger cat sitting on a mat. The product yielded by picturing is a bunch of patterns in which qualitative differences between patterns may be discerned, but without any key or synoptic index being available to allow us to gage *which* particular dispensation of patterns of patterns – *which* schema of discernment of sub-patterns within this baroque tapestry – would indicate *what is really going on*. Practice here remains totally opaque to its own knowledge of itself. There is no short-cut by which to escape the necessity of going back to the full-bloodedly inferential and deliriously counterfactual-risking level of *signifying* – of *conceptualization* – *if* what we care about is trying to hack some truth out of the coalface of erroneous wrongness. This is the radical discontinuity which Sellars introduces into Wittgenstein's continuum.

However, tied up with this negative point is a substantively positive one regarding meaning-making or sense-making per se. Or perhaps, rather, one should define the point to be broached as one regarding the making of *intelligibility and new intelligibilities*. It would indeed *not* be correct to say that picturing flattens acts of speech or writing onto a purely univocal plane of indifference or homogeneity. To claim this would be to claim that the differences structuring the field of a 'picture' are *purely quantitative*. Clearly they are not: there are *qualitative differences in kind* which are necessarily in play: 'angular vs squiggly' being *different in kind* to 'big vs small', which is in turn different in kind to 'near vs distant', just as much as 'near vs distant' is different in kind to 'thick vs thin' or 'loud vs quiet'. This being accepted, the interesting

thing to note is that these qualitative properties of bits of speech or writing or drawing[343] must be themselves accounted for, qua qualitatively discernible from each other within the field of intelligibility wherein they are discerned. What is the condition of possibility or condition of effectivity of their being perceptible-discernible? This is nothing other than the question of the constitution of '*sense*' per se; that is, of the nature of the givenness of *meaning* – the question of semantics at the deepest level. My point here is precisely that this question ultimately cannot be separated from *the question of syntax*, of how syntactical properties come to be given. As argued above in defense of Hegel against Badiou's criticism of him, there is a semantics proper to the discernibility of syntactical properties – a movement of differentiating negativity proper to that discernibility – and hence the recourse to syntactical properties as if they were somehow 'pure' or 'bare' would be a bogus vulgar-materialist move.

Confronted with this point, some readers of Hegel have been tempted to positivize 'sense' by making the contrary through distinguishment from which it gains its intelligibility, non-sense, into some sort of Plotinian overflowing self-causing 'force', from which determinate sense – the discernible perceptible, or indeed the counterfactually conjecturable – would be some kind of *subtraction*. But to do this is to substantialize non-sense by pushing it out into a non-conceptually-mediated simple exteriority, hypostatizing and metaphysically thickening opacity itself, and to let sense-making fall apart from it (from opaque nonsense) onto the side of subjectivity where it will

---

[343] Albert Lautman launches an instructive interrogation during a 1939 colloquium, although his comment does not directly address the qualitative shifts and differentiations amongst purely geometrical properties – for a curve is *qualitatively different* from a straight line (Jean Cavaillès and Albert Lautman, 'Mathematical Thought', trans. Robin Mackay, [1939], 20. https://www.urbanomic.com/document/mathematical-thought/.):

> What do I think, when I say that I think this room? Either I speak of lived impressions, rigorously untranslatable, rigorously unusable by way of a rule, or else I do the geometry of this room, and I do mathematics. What do you think when you think a plane? The geometric properties of that plane, the symmetry?

Before reaching the conclusion of our investigation we will see Lautman explicitly raising the issue of qualitative difference in mathematics. But we can see here already that there is a non-trivial post-Hegelian question to ask. Those who wish to *avoid* a straightforward Platonism with respect to mathematics (or a Platonic *physics of mathematics* such as Lautman's, based in the *Timaeus*) cannot but find interest in the prospect of a non-metaphysical account of qualitative difference that would detach *thesei* (convention: the norm or rule) from *physei* (nature) without losing the binding truth of the Laws of form qua form. If we agree with Hegel that quality is a matter of inter-reflected *negativity*, then negativity would hereupon have to be our starting point, even if we saw fit to criticize Hegel himself for eliding form qua form with an *automatically* self-interiorizing uber-subject worrying redolent of the nature of the *Timeaus*.

serve as an unexplained explainer, the non-naturalizable skyhook of an Aristotelian *potentas* or essential capacity to harvest or build new meanings. Take for example this passage from Jean Hyppolite's *Logic and Existence*, his monograph on matters logical in Hegel. To be clear, we here find Hyppolite muscularly engaged in fighting the good fight of trying to avoid one-sidedly hardening the non-conceptual realm into a simply exterior exteriority which would nonetheless be accessible to us, crashing in on top of our heads in our quivering passivity.

> The Logos is the other of Nature; it is in its determination a negation. It therefore refers itself to this other and reflects it into itself. 'If there were only ideas, there would be no ideas.' In this self-negation as Nature, the Logos sublates itself. [...] The Logos contradicts itself. It is being as nature, but as the universal determination of being, it is also the nothingness of this determination. The contradiction of Essence is the contradiction of nature posited as contradiction, that of being simultaneously itself and it opposite, Nature and Logos, being and sense.
>
> Here perhaps we get to the decisive point of Hegelianism, to this torsion of thought through which we are able to think conceptually the unthinkable, to what makes Hegel simultaneously the greatest irrationalist and the greatest rationalist who has existed. We cannot exit from the Logos, but the Logos exits from itself by remaining itself; since it is the indivisible self, the Absolute, it thinks the non-thought. It thinks sense in its relation to non-sense, to the opaque being of nature.[344]

Hyppolite gives us a crystalline encapsulation of why idealism is not exclusionary of materialism, but rather, when properly prosecuted, *demands* it: 'If there were only ideas, there would be no ideas.' And he crucially thematizes the 'torsion' at the heart of the dialectic of truth and appearance, of infinity and the finite. However, while the Logos may be the other of Nature, nature is equally the other of the Logos, and the two enjoy a unity-in-difference qua contradictorily coinciding opposites. The negativity of self-conscious knowing introduced through the dialectic of Lord and bondsman in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is not exactly the same self-relating negativity as that of being and non-being or essence and appearance *tout court* – but it *is* a certain type of conditioned involution of the latter. In other words, the argument we propose to the reader is that knowing – of which sense-making, in the sense of perceptual-intuitive

[344] Jean Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, trans. Leonard Lawlor & Amit Sen, Albany: SUNY, 1997, 102. Translation modified.

discerning-differentiating, is a part – must be viewed as naturalizable-in-the-last-instance. And the worry is that Hyppolite, by leaving the door open to the one-sided *positivization* of *opacity per se*, may allow it to be reified in separation from the practical moment of the act of *determination*, of the 'piercing of the noumenon' through the building of new self-transparent knowledge. Why should opacity be construed as anything other than the inverse of the moment of transparency? (We ask the reader to bear in mind that we have argued in favour of rejecting the correspondence theory of truth through resemblance or usefulness – 'transparency' thus means 'concrete determinacy increasing the effectivity (*Wirklichkeit*) of practice' through the negation of the negation: through the constructive and constructivist mediating determination of abstract non-mediated immediacy.) Hyppolite leaves the door open to the *phenomenological circumscription of meaning-making, and the phenomenological circumscription of determinacy-discernment-through-determinacy-construction, via the figure of 'sense'*, a term which teeters back and forth in a pun between *conceptual signification* and *the perceptible*.[345] The implicit tethering of the *creation* of new meanings and new perceptibles to criteria of success circumscribed within the sphere of *feeling* and *already perceptible sensibles* is precisely what we see in (at least some moments of) Deleuze's earliest works of independent philosophy, for example when he has recourse to Bergson in *Difference and Repetition*, and when in *Logic of Sense* the subtraction from – or efflorescence out of – sense from nonsense is conceived as an

[345] Pages 24-27 of *Logic and Existence* are symptomatic in this regard, riffing *critically* on a declaration attributed to Merleau-Ponty, that in the non-verbal arts 'speech is itself mute', but then building to this rather Heideggerean-sounding passage regarding Absolute Knowing:

> Object and subject finally transcend themselves as such in the authentic language of being, in the Hegelian ontology. This language appears as the existence of the essence, and the dialectical discourse appears as the becoming of sense. However, within natural language, how is this language, which is no longer that of anyone, which is being's universal self-consciousness, to be distinguished from human, all-too-human, language?

But how are we supposed to here understand the terms 'sense', 'being', and 'ontology', given what we have already discovered through reading Hegel's primary texts? We may worry that there is a modicum of straw-manning happening here (be it rhetorically necessary), especially if we are in agreement with Comay and Ruda in *The Dash* that the transition from the *Phenomenology* to the *Logic* is deliberately an irreversible or asymmetrical phase-shift. If Feuerbach is reported to have quipped, with respect to the fact that the 'Remarks' in the *Logic* often feature empirical examples, that it's better to 'bring your footnotes up into the main part of your essay', still it is not necessarily self-evident that the right critical response will be to hurriedly patch up all of the discontinuities implied in this disconnection, nor that one should try indiscriminately to introduce trip-wire discontinuities into the *Logic*'s main text.

unconditional movement (which will later be modified to become the Absolute movement of 'deterritorialization', an altogether different kettle of fish, and in my view much more powerful and cutting). Indeed, Deleuze had reviewed Hyppolite's book, and drew inspiration from it – critical inspiration, but inspiration none the less[346].

In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze announces that 'The whole of Phenomenology is an epiphenomenology'[347], but nonetheless uses the Bergsonian account of 'contractions'[348] to feed into a semantics in which sensibility (external affection) is short-circuited with signification, such that *signs* – the bearers of meaning – are constituted through the contractive envelopment of bare 'impressions', which are particulars, by a 'living present'[349] from which there may then be 'developed' generalities, something which needs to be done in order to be able to anticipate the future (prediction again!). To the imagination is ascribed a 'contractile power: like a sensitive plate, it retains one case when others appear. It contracts cases, elements, agitations or homogenous instants and grounds these in an internal qualitative impression endowed with a certain weight.'[350] A sign is a contraction[351], and the sign-contraction applies on a homogenous continuum equally as much to the irritability of the organism's viscera in reaction to external stimuli, and indeed at the lower level of inorganic physics insofar as complex systems emerge from that level, or any determinable particulars at all – 'What we call wheat is a contraction of the earth and humidity, and this contraction is both a contemplation and the auto-satisfaction of that contemplation'[352] – all the way up to the reception and grasping of full-blown narratively situated and counterfactually ramified meanings – 'A scar is the sign not of a past wound but of "the present fact of having been wounded": we can say that it is the contemplation of the wound,

---

[346] Gilles Deleuze, 'Review of Jean Hyppolite's *Logique et existence*', first published in *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 144 : 457 (1954), http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpdeleuze6.htm.

[347] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, London/NY: Continuum, 2004, 63.

[348] *Ibid.*, 92-104.

[349] *Ibid.*, 90-91.

[350] *Ibid.*

[351] *Ibid.*, 94.

[352] *Ibid.*, 96.

that it contracts all the instants which separate us from it into a living present.'[353] We will pass over the presuppositions regarding time and temporality which are in play here. But if *activity* in meaning-making (as opposed to passivity) is limited to the production of generalities which have cast off their links with the *happening* of the registration of the contraction on the sensitive plate, and if the 'contemplation' – explicitly always a '*passive* synthesis'[354] – constitutes the contraction furnishing the raw material for activity – the 'sign which is interpreted or deployed in active synthesis'[355] – then it seems quite clear that the generation of meaning has been phenomenologically circumscribed. There is a givenness of meanings which is in any and all instances phenomenological, and necessarily so.

It is thus not surprising when *nonsense* is hypostatized in *The Logic of Sense* as a Plotinian caldron which itself, all by itself, *generates* 'sense'. Like Sellars, Deleuze here quite rightly wants to strip properties and classes of any transcendent status, and to puncture the 'divine universal'[356]. However, the fact that meanings are distinguished from determinacies which are meaningless as a condition of their being understood as meanings does not license that something called 'sense' be separated from determinacy – 'determinacy' being the identification or discernment of what properties are there in the thing being intuited – in order to be opposed to 'nonsense'. Are we to say that that which is meaningless is non-determinable and unintelligible? Deleuze says that 'nonsense does not have any particular sense, but is opposed to the absence of sense rather than to the sense that it produces in excess'[357]. He is absolutely right to insist that not everything is 'meaningful', and that meaning itself is produced through meaningless non-conceptual processes; and by referring to Jackobsonian structuralism he even brushes up against the movement of negativity, although he in no way wants to admit this (and so he halts at the 'first negation' and thus will, in my diagnosis, here end up stuck in a bad infinity). But if 'sense' is synonymous with 'determinability' or 'intelligibility' – and I take it that there is nothing non-determinable or unintelligible about squiggles, zigzags, vectors, speeds, torques, or the various properties of aural noise, or of disorder in general, since disorder can be patterned, conceptualized and mathematised in fine-grained ways – then 'nonsense' will turn out to be synonymous with mere indeterminacy,

[353] *Ibid.*, 98-99.

[354] *Ibid.*, 94; my emphasis.

[355] *Ibid.*, 94.

[356] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, London: Athlone, 1990, 72.

[357] *Ibid.*, 71.

an empty indeterminate negation of the already capacious category of 'determinacy'. While I respect Deleuze's attack upon the religiosity of vulgar Platonism in this 'Eleventh Series of Nonsense' of his *Logic of Sense*, and also hail his insistence that our goal must be (paraphrasing freely) to take it upon ourselves to *produce* (a term which however must be treated with caution) *new* determinacies, the recourse to 'sense' in this work of the first phase of his career seems to blur and smother important distinctions, and in so doing to beg an array of questions. 'Nonsense' has been inflated in neo-Spinozist fashion so as to squash properties and classes – universals – rather than explaining what they are. In consequence, subjectivity falls into a passive subservience to a phenomenologically circumscribed nonsense in its supposed fecund overspill, in a non-interventional 'survey of the surface'[358]. The formulation of the problem here is penetrating and the marshalling of resources admirably experimental and 'Catholic' in its tastes, but the way certain of the marshalled resources are used blocks the discovery of a solution to the problem, and the proposal proffered founders upon the mere first negation of the idea of self-standing Universals.

What then can Sellars offer by way of trying to solve the problem? What *are* predicable properties such that one can say that they are effective (*Wirklich*), without thereby metaphysically freezing them? Sellars' response is that they are constructions which are *normatively* built and individuated. Who builds them? We – concept-mongers – do. Intuition and intentionality are both linguistic affairs, hence *picturing itself*, insofar as we are able to appreciate its reality, is a linguistic affair. This opens the way to the line of hypothesis which I favour, viz., that our creative capacities are *socially* enabled and constrained. Furthermore, although the full-bloodedly conceptual signification of counterfactual scenarios and of goal-setting and justification is certainly not the same thing as the picture-building of qualitatively differentiated features of sign-designs, it will rapidly become clear that, from the Sellarso-Hegelian perspective, placing a hard barrier between them is bogus. Sellars makes this clear in his definition of sign-designs ('linguistic objects': figures in chalk, vocal eructations, morse-code beeps) as, at one and the same time, belonging directly to the natural-physical order, *and yet* <u>not</u> being determinately intuitable by us save through deployment of rules and principles which are the fruits of our own practice rather than the fruits of nature:

> If picturing is to be a relation between objects in the natural order, this means that the linguistic objects in question must belong to the natural order. And this means that we must be considering them in terms of empirical [i.e., physical-real] properties and matter-of-factual

[358] *Ibid.*, 72.

> relations, though these may, indeed must, be very complex, involving all kinds of constant conjunctions or uniformities pertaining to the language user and his environment. *Specifically, although we may, indeed must, know that these linguistic objects are subject to rules and principles – are fraught with 'ought' – we abstract from this knowledge in considering them as objects in the natural order*. Let me introduce the term 'natural-linguistic object' to refer to linguistic objects thus considered.[359]

To fully unpack this we need only be able to seize why exactly Sellars calls his brand of nominalism a *metalinguistic* nominalism.

But, keeping tabs on why we care about Sellars' argument, let us note two things before launching into our summary of the metalinguistic aspect of his nominalism. Firstly, one of the important stakes here – for our study, if not for Sellars' own project as he conceives it – is that of *seeing if Hegel can be saved from the accusation that he himself is guilty of the Myth of the Given*. Sellars on at least two occasions explicitly proclaims his affinity with Hegel, but he also vaguely suggests that Hegel may, at the end of the day, fall foul of the Myth. There are various angles from which critics of Hegel have raised analogues of this serious and important concern – but the immediate stake in this subsection revolves around *how* it is that the properties of sign designs – e.g., angular vs squiggly – present themselves to us as discernibly qualitatively differentiated. A hasty reading of Hegel's conception of 'Absolute Knowledge' and of the opening sections of his *Logic* might lead one to surmise that Hegel believes that he is ultimately able to shuck off mediate opacity and effectuate the speculative identity of subject and object by simply standing back and somehow finding a way to allow the things-in-themselves to reveal themselves as-they-are-in-themselves in a cloyingly Romantic revelatory *Parousia*-ballet. I believe that this reading would be totally incorrect, and would thus miss the opportunity of weaponizing the important *critical* resources Hegel has elaborated, which would be a shame – but unless I can adumbrate an explanation as to why and how it is incorrect I will be guilty of fatuous hand-waving.

Secondly – a point which is separate from the one we have just made – it is important to note that another major stake here – for Sellars just as much as for the argument presented by us – is that of coming up with a riposte to Skepticism. Sellars is committed (like Lakatos) to a transcendental (fallibilistic) realism with respect to the natural sciences. He is well aware that he is here operating on the territory claimed by Pyrrhonic skepticism and the Agrippan trilemma, which maintain that there can be no justifiably 'true' judgement about anything – not even

[359] Sellars, 'Truth and "Correspondence'', 210. My interposition.

regarding *what* the properties of sense-perceptible determinations *are*, nor regarding the presupposable conditions of effectivity of the facticity of the determinability of these determinations – because, so they maintain (rejecting the force of reasoning by the absurd), *any* justification will turn out to be grounded either upon an arbitrary assumption, or a vicious circle, or an infinite regress[360]. We will not belabour this point, but it seems helpful to mention it by way of limning in one of the motivations behind the specific strategy Sellars adopts in offering a solution to the problem posed by the non-independence of predicates – namely, that of articulating picturing with full-blown semantics.

What then of Sellars' metalinguistic functional-role semantics? 'Red' is not a *substantial* universal, an instantiation of what would be the abstract entity 'redness'. Rather, it is a linguistic type. It plays a certain *functional role* in the English language – and when we thematize its functioning we shall show that we are *talking about* the role it plays *in our talk* by deploying a notational marker such as those developed by Sellars, for example, by bracketing it with asterisks: *red*. A *red* is a *metalinguistic sortal*. Equally, take the word 'triangular'. Correlating the use of this predicable with that predicable which plays the role parallel to it in German, we can make the metalinguistic assertion: 'A *triangular* is a *dreieckig*'. Such a metalinguistic assertion correlates the *functions* played by the words – by the sign-designs – in the two languages, which is to say that it correlates *patterns of tokenings*. A linguistic type is nothing other than a pattern of tokenings. A tokening is a linguistic act which deploys a word in a move in a rule-governed language-game. There is no need to animadvert to any transcendent abstract entity to explain the actuality of a pattern of tokenings: social linguistic practice will suffice[361]. *Red*, *triangular*,

[360] Cf. Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism*, Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2005, 8.

[361] Such is certainly a key Sellarsian argument. But we can complicate this in two ways. Firstly, as already seen, in Sellars himself we have the ambition of thinking of social and normed practice – through a 'materialist sublation' – as itself emerging, via pattern-governed behavior, out of non-normed Darwian-evolutionary material complexity. This move, far from being reductivist, on my reading questioningly blurs the supposition that conceptual spontaneity's ingredients must be juxtapositionally separated from natural *Ohnmacht* (compulsive causation). Indeed, the speculative-dialectical dynamic in Sellars shouldn't be underestimated: for him, the theorization of the scientific image is a vector of the *negation* of malfunctions in the manifest image, and when he says that 'the better is the enemy of the best' he means to say 'No!' to the calcification as 'perfected' of any step in the historical development of physics, and 'No!' to the *metaphysically 'givenist' reification* of his own *models*, including that of the language game. And secondly, we are here moving in the direction of asking, in the following subsection, whether materialism can afford – in the task of understanding social practice, conceptual spontaneity, and Newness – to dispense with

and *dreieckig*, when we thus conceptualize them, are to be called 'metalinguistic sortals', because they collect and classify – discern and determine – patterns of linguistic acts of tokening which actually happen in practice. Sellars is of course not, and cannot be, saying that these practical acts are brutely transparent to consciousness. Rather he is deducing that linguistic acts must have normative force. Linguistic practice is rule-governed: there are no metaphysical substances here (and certainly not any Plotinian ones). In chess there are rules ('ought-to-dos') for using the pawn or any other piece, but one may decide to play with Cadillacs for queens, Volkswagens for pawns, and counties for squares – Texas chess[362] – and new games can be invented. In the expression 'The lion is tawny', the characteristic of being tawny is not predicated of an abstract entity, *lionhood*. Indeed, it would be bizarre to say that 'The abstract universal entity "lionhood" is tawny'; the expression under scrutiny would be better cashed out as meaning 'Lions are tawny'. 'Tawny' should therefore be understand as being predicated *distributively* of *particular* lions. 'The lion' – viewed from the metalinguistic vantage – is thus a *distributive singular term* which tracks and indicates practical tokenings in acts of predication. Metalinguistic sortals are therefore always at the same time distributive singular terms.

But what is crucial is that in Sellars a *realism of the act* – which we are convinced, post-Kant, must be pursued – is concluded to only be workable if we take seriously the *effective (to speak Hegelese, Wirklich: operative) normative force of rules, of <u>the ought</u>*. It is concluded by Sellars that if we do not take this seriously then dogmatically separated metaphysical substances will keep unwittingly popping up in our semantics. Hence:

Socrates exemplifies wisdom

> does not assert a relation between Socrates and wisdom, for the *Socrates* is functioning as a metalinguistic expression in the material mode of speech. Thus the 'relation' of exemplification which for [vulgar] Platonists binds the realm of becoming to the realm of being, and which for more moderate realists binds the 'real' order to the 'logical' or 'conceptual' order, is an offshoot of the 'relation' of truth, which analysis shows to be no relation at all, *but a sign that something is to be done*.[363]

Hegelian negativity. Is the *ought* fraught with self-relating negativity? (The quotation regarding better and best is from Sellars, 'Phenomenalism', in Sellars, *Science, Perception, and Reality*, 63-107, 100.)

[362] Sellars, 'Abstract Entities', *Review of Metaphysics* 16:4, June 1963, 627-671, 637.

[363] Sellars, 'Abstract Entities', 669. My interposition and italics.

And again, 'instead of standing for a relation or relational property of statements (or, for that matter, of thoughts), "true" is a sign *that something is to be done* – for inferring is a doing.'[364]

4. *Wrong Wrongness*

Inferring is a doing, and 'true' is a sign that something is to be done. Hegel has been dragged into this already thorny thicket because he possesses the resources – or so we would like to intimate – to help us avoid letting this important nominalistic insight collapse back into vulgarity. (A suggestion will be made at the conclusion of this study as to why it is arguable that Sellars himself lacks such resources.) As Wilhelm Windelband remarks, nominalism in its Medieval heyday had a tendency to flip over into *sensualism*.[365] Anselm and Abelard record that there was a movement among some nominalists to try to think only 'in' corporeal images. But after Kant we know that there are no self-presenting actualities, and that our access to the perceptible properties *even of words* is in no way im-mediate. Sellars rams this point home. For him, there would be no perceptible properties which self-consciousness could discern (about which we can *know that* we are knowing them, and hence reflect upon and conceptualize them) if there were not a gap between the *is* and the *ought* in the form of that condition of perceiving that is (according to him) rule-following.

But this does not tell us what qualitative difference *is*. 'Angular' and 'squiggly' are qualitatively different. Hegel has a theory about the formal structure of qualitative difference which articulates it with *effectivity*, saving it from ricocheting back and forth endlessly in the bad infinity of a Kantian 'phenomenon' metaphysically separated from the noumenon. Indeed, Hegel has in a way dialectically superseded the philosophical dualism between thought and thing. But this supersession is a *critical* one only insofar as it has been achieved *without* absolutizing any given point of determinacy, least of all an experiential point, as a transparent contact with a brute reality – whence the inconsolable restlessness of the negative. Thus Hegel's negation of Kantian dualism need not necessarily mean that he would deny that a very large quotient of wrongness persists even as our knowledge – be it of contents or of forms – gains in concretion, nor that he does not believe that regressions in knowledge are possible: one step forward then two back.

And yet by Hegel's own lights it seems that some story must be told to account for the actuality of this very gap between the *is* and the *ought* – this fundamental epistemic wrongness –

---

[364] Sellars, 'Truth and "Correspondence"' in *Science, Perception and Reality*, 204.

[365] Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy – Volume I: Greek, Roman, Medieval*, trans. James H. Tufts, NY: Harper & Row, 1958, 297.

which gap is the condition of being able to revisably and immanently draw a line between what is true and what is mere appearance. One such story would be an account offered by Sellars, which says that children are trained into becoming concept-mongers, with biological instinct – pattern-governed behavior – being forced into an involution such as to become rule-obeying practice. This is what Nietzsche called the prolonged regime of torture viewed by him as necessary to produce an animal that is able to bind itself to a rule[366], '[t]o breed an animal with the prerogative to *promise*'[367]. Hegel has clearly announced that he has little respect for the philosophies of the *ought* – those of Kant and Fichte. But perhaps what he is thereby acknowledging is that the gap between the *is* and the *ought* must be *desubstantialized*, *de-metaphysicalized*, and *de-theologized*, precisely in order to render unto this very *ought* its effective actuality and reality.

On the one hand, to deny actuality to what Spirit can and does determine, including the perceived contents we earlier called 'stains' – to *deny* that they are *part of nature* – would reinstate Kantian dualism. On the other hand, to deny that they are 'fraught with ought' – shot through with wrongness (that of underdetermined second-order isomorphism and entanglement in conditioning by self-estranging social practices – on which more presently) would short-circuit epistemic finitude, deny that knowing is a failure-prone self-correcting *activity*, and relapse into pre-critical transparency.

Reading Sellars alongside Hegel thus points to a stubbornness of the *ought*. To do something new – to build or create something new in order to effectuate Truth – is not to conciliate wrongness into rightness by sealing up the gap between the *is* and the *ought*. Rather, it is to be disloyal to a given already-determined wrongness: it is to wrong wrongness. I am not suggesting that Sellars has provided an account sufficient to solve this problem – the problem of the vagaries of the *ought*. I do contest however that it is a real and really compelling problem, and that Sellarso-

---

[366] 'And may we not add that this world has really never quite lost a certain odour of blood and torture? (not even with old Kant: the categorical imperative smells of cruelty…).' (Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe, Cambridge: CUP, 2006, 41.) My reading of this statement is dialectical and passes by Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Wild animals live under the regime of predation, that of irreflexive killing and being-killed. But no opportunity presents itself to simply step out from the tutelage of compulsion. In lieu of an easy escape, predation is surpassed – imperfectly – when natural impulse is *stifled* or *redoubled* through a regime of training and rule-following. There can be no escape from predation and no self-conscious thought without this regime of auto-suppressing discipline. And there can be no possibility of freedom either. In the Wagnerian saw dear to Hegelians such as Žižek, 'the wound will be healed only by the spear that wrought it'.

[367] Nietzsche, *Ibid.*, 35.

Hegelianism may yield it some fuel. I contest also that a certain pay-off to the foregoing discussion can be attained by moving to assert a Historical Materialist (i.e., Marxian-Engelsian) stance towards the historiography of the natural sciences. This allows one to highlight the importance of noting that *contradiction* is not the same thing as *incommensurability*.

However, before moving to support this assertion, it may be helpful to cash out and make explicit another entailment of the forgoing discussion, concerning empirical representation and its dialectic of inside and outside. This will require five or six pages' worth of discussion.

5. *The dialectics of inside and outside and the structural thematics of envelopment*

Deleuze and Guattari, Badiou (since 1988 and before 1968), and Laruelle all reject the problematic of representation. (This is a refusal they share with Heidegger.) They all deny that there could be any philosophical seriousness to be had in postulating that there is a gap of non-identity between the way we represent things – 'cinnabar is the mineral form of mercury, and it is heavy and red' – and the way things really are insofar as we might postulate that they are not the way we say they are – 'cinnabar is an object=x of which our conception is not 100% adequate'. It is judged that the theme of such a gap is inconsequential, if not pernicious. Natural scientists and social scientists may believe they are trying to narrow an effectively actual distance between the content-of-representation and the represented thing, but what they are *really* doing – whenever they succeed in effectuating Truth or a movement of deterritorialization – is nothing of the sort. Rather, success is always an immanent action which is immanent only to itself and refers only to itself. It is untouched by the negativity of what would be its own 'wrongness', which is to say, it is untouched by the oppositional negativity of the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, or that – which might itself pretend to be immanently and revisably drawn – between reality and error. These are Kantian-Hegelian hang-ups chronically in hock to a bogus transcendence, for they isolate subjectivity in a supercilious detachment from what is real only in order to then subject this abstract subjectivity to flagellation by an object spuriously elevated on an unreachable pedestal which is merely a cypher for the God of the Church. Aspirations to determinate negation are viewed as the rose-tinted pieties of a compromise with liberal reformism which loses the Absolute and fatally starts listening to acts of saying of which the normative authority is not cemented to any acephalic materiality. It is judged that the problematic of representation is doomed for having wanted to install itself as transcendent, hardening the line of a two-world metaphysics such as to escape the univocal idiomaticity implied in the unavoidability of brute repetition and mimicry attendant upon the destitution of the delusion of extraneously pre-given goals and transcendent models to copy.

When the gap between saying (conceptualizing) and doing (action) has been disavowed, and one wants – if we may use Nietzschean language – to go beyond good and evil (for the anti-representationalists: adequate vs inadequate representings), but without abandoning the

distinction between good and bad (success vs failure; Truth or deterritorialization vs subservience to already-established stratifications), an option for how to proceed which presents itself is that of the structural thematics of envelopment. Deleuze and Guattari have recourse to a structuration of enveloping and enveloped, which allows them to avoid the negativity of representation. In *A Thousand Plateaus* intensive multiplicities are those which cannot divide themselves in a manner resembling the quantitative without leaping wholesale from one qualitative kind to another, '[e]xactly like a speed or a temperature, which is not composed of other speeds and temperatures but rather is enveloped in or envelops others, each of which marks a change in nature.'[368] Deleuze and Guattari rightly insist on the importance of the New, and they rightly insist against certain Heideggerian streams that the natural and mathematical sciences have their part to play in the creation of it. According to them, in order to build a 'plane of consistency' which constructs new assemblages out of the old strata, there is no need to wager on representing anything. Rather, connectivity between strongly affirmative forces is increased by selecting precisely the affirmative forces, as opposed to the negatively reactive ones, to construct with. A stratum envelops forces which can be developed.

But how to decide where the affirmative forces are? How to decide which procedures are meet to develop them? The rejection of representation is at the same time a rejection of the negativity of norms – of the active subjective decision to set a standard or rule and commit oneself to acting upon it. A norm is 'negative' insofar as it sets itself against the way things are: by definition it is, in-the-first-instance, on the side of subjectivity, and, by definition, it actively intervenes to draw a line between rule-obeying and rule-flouting which is underdetermined by any given. This is why norms are, potentially, arbitrary and procrustean, or worse. But if the stumbling dialectic of norm-setting and norm-revision – of which the dialectic of representing, with its content (its inside) and its thing=x (its outside) has been ruled out, it would seem that we are passive and must accept where and how the right forces to be developed are to be found as a simple given. Furthermore, does distinguishing between different types of force (strong and reactive) not involve *representing* different types of force? And if we are willing to say there are different types of force, why are we not willing to say that the subjective-normative level is different in kind to the physical level?

A more mellifluous ancestor of this thematics of enveloping and enveloped can be found in Gaston Bachelard's 1940 book *The Philosophy of No* [*La philosophie du non*]. But, in contrast, here we also have an open avowal of some kind of negativity. Further, Bachelard is in this book avowedly Kantian in methodology, although his goal is to defend the cognitive penetrability of

[368] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, London/NY: Bloomsbury, 2013, 35.

the noumenon – indeed he formulates a brilliant slogan on this score to which we will refer in our Conclusion. Bachelard rightly wants to negate the immediately given appearance – the way-things-seem-to-be – as conditional and superficial: not only merely relative, but also revisable in a way productive of truth. However, he wants to do so without embracing Hegel. It seems that the Bergsonian and neo-Kantian ambiance of his moment prevents him here from harvesting the benefits of his own concept of the 'epistemological obstacle'. Another author's denial (that of C. Bialobrzeski) that contradictory notions can or could appear in physics is cited – it is a denial which we will attempt to assail in the next subsection, with the help of Alexandre Koyré – and Hegel's dialectic is accused of being an *a priori* dialectic.[369] This accusation seems to us to fit all too well with a common misreading: is not a chief axis of Hegel's project precisely that of asserting against Kant that *there is no a priori*? In spite of the cramped conditions Bachelard sets for himself, his subtlety is on display in the acknowledgement that in the natural sciences mathematization implies an ever-present, indifferently non-annullable, non-sublateable facet: the preservation of invariants throughout theory-changes, such that, from one perspective, clashing theories can be viewed as merely incommensurable (rather than contradictory), while more powerful theories can be said to 'envelop' – re-explain the facts explained by – weaker ones. What is interesting for our purposes is that, *sans* Hegel, Bachelard cannot postulate a 'second negation' – a negation of the negation – which would furnish a catastrophically (non-linearly) *surprising* moment of construction-discovery. He is forced rather to say that negation and surpassing happens through an expansive generalization which chips away at axioms in order to replace them in a revelatory fashion.

> Negation must remain in touch with the previous elaboration. It must permit a *dialectical generalization*. Generalization through the 'no' [*par le non*] must include what it denies. Indeed the whole impetus of scientific thought for a century now stems from dialectical generalizations of this sort, which envelop what has been denied. Thus non-Euclidean geometry envelops Euclidean geometry; non-Newtonian mechanics envelops Newtonian mechanics; wave mechanics envelops relativistic mechanics.[370]

Without pausing to consider what Bachelard's 'no' has in common with Laruelle's 'non-', we can agree wholeheartedly that clues for novel theory-building can be found in extant

[369] Gaston Bachelard, *The Philosophy of No,* trans. G. C. Waterston, NY: Orion Press, 1968 [1940], 116.

[370] *Ibid.*, 117. Translation modified.

theories. It seems nonetheless that Bachelard here will not be able to avoid getting stuck on the first negation.[371] This sort of 'envelopment' is merely formal and *ex post factum*. It makes sense – if we are careful to speak *ex post festum* – to talk about envelopment in pure mathematics, because here form is directly identical to content: mathematics is the axiomatic science of form qua form, hence its content cannot contradict its form but is the moment of the discovery of new properties of form as such. Non-Euclidean geometry for sure does not *contradict* Euclid so much as it operates an expansion upon his system which extends it and hence makes it more powerful: more capable of yielding new contents. But the same cannot so easily be said for physics. It is hard to see how a generalization which lifts or cancels, or refashions, a mere few axioms among others, thereby *expanding* the previous system, could lead from Newton to Einstein, or from the curved space of the latter to the wave function in quantum mechanics. Bachelard's empiricism causes him to hesitate on the threshold of utter negativity – and our proposal is that there is no other way to make sense of the idea of a genuinely new scientific discovery… or of anything new at all. Bachelard dismisses as 'basically naïve' a highly suggestive quotation from Novalis, although Lacan would quibble with calling the knowledge-producer a 'Master' (- is not the stance of modern science that of an empty crown?)

> Just as all pieces of knowledge are interlinked, so all pieces of non-knowledge are interlinked also. Anyone who can create a science can also create a non-science. Anyone who can render something comprehensible must also be able to make it incomprehensible. The master must be able to produce knowledge and ignorance.[372]

In this passage by Novalis Bachelard does not like the idea that something determinate and binding can come from utter negativity. We do like this – according to Hegel positivity is

---

[371] Indeed, he quite clearly states that he does not want to countenance the second negation:

> A philosophy of no aiming only at juxtaposed systems, systems which place themselves in a relation to some precise point of fact – such a philosophy is, above all else, careful not to deny two things at a time. It has no confidence in the coherence of two negations. (*Ibid.*)

This suggests that Bachelard is adhering to an 'intuitionist' logic rejecting reasoning by the absurd, against Hegel. But the riposte must be – with Sellars, Hegel, and Lakatos – to question the epistemic status of 'some precise point of fact'.

[372] Novalis, *Fragments*, cited by Bachelard, *Idem.*

negativity negating itself – but what we do not like is the presupposition of a transparency between knowledge and non-knowledge, this presupposition being the elixir of Jena Romanticism on a Black Mass moonshine brew of which George Bataille will claim to get drunk.

On the contrary, the conclusion we would like to proffer for scrutiny is that, in order to avoid superciliously arrogating to subjectivity a get-out-of-jail-free-card exempting it from idiomaticity (mimesis and repetition without a transcendent model) one must posit a total opacity between thought and thing as well as between thought and itself. And the only the way to do this is to accept the effectivity of rules (norms) which are in-the-first-instance entirely deprived of natural purpose, telos, axiology, physics, or movement. As Sellars has it

> If 'sensing' is used as a term for the awareness of a sensible item *as* having a certain sensible character, then it should not also be used for the generic state which stands to bluely as dancing stands to waltzily.[373]

What is given to self-consciousness is normatively individuated – individuated according to rules which are not metaphysically necessary, and which are revisable. There is no need to accuse representation of believing itself to be exempt from idiomaticity, because there is no need to conceive representation as tethered to Mythical Givenness. Adequation in representing need not have anything to do with correspondence through resemblance or 'usefulness', and it is always shot through with wrongness. The form of the content of a representing is blind to the form of the representing qua *act*. Qualitatively differing determinacies amongst the contents of representings imply qualitatively different (socially conditioned) entanglements of doing, of *practice*. Dancing waltzily; sensing bluely; dancing tango-ishly; dancing polka-ishly; dancing foxtrotily; dancing twerkily; agitating moshingly; judging pathologically; cursing blithely; exchanging commodities unconsciously. Such doings can be postulated as the representings-in-themselves qua acts which are the counterparts of the contents of instances of representation. Hence practical mimesis does *not necessarily* oppositively exclude conceptualization. The Sellarso-Hegelian argument will be that, as practice is opaque, the only way to build a knowledge of it is through a normed labour the shapes of which are underdetermined by it. For these two thinkers, the only way out of the trap is by constructing another trap in which to ensnare oneself.

Quite simply, the only way to parry the objection that we thus end up with a 'frictionless spinning'[374] – with norms grappling with each other without ever gaining traction upon any non-

[373] Sellars, FMPP, I, §157.

[374] John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1996, 67.

normative happenings – is to affirm reasoning-by-the-absurd. In Hyppolite's words: if there were only ideas, there would be no ideas. This is important because the cynicism which typically during the past century meets Kant's affirmation of the contentful or content-producing *spontaneity* of the understanding – its capacity to *create new rules for determining determinations and connecting them with each other* – is a cynicism which, as we have argued, may often be found to be mortgaged to naivety regarding the givenness of whatever is supposed to block this creative capacity. The materiality of the act is opaque to consciousness, but this does not mean that it is not real, nor that representing is not an *act* which can have material consequences. And we must remember that representation is to be put in a back-and-forth relation with non-representational thinking and non-representational intelligibilities. The point is that the line between inside and outside, appearance and reality, subjectivity and objectivity is a line that *we* have to *decide* to draw – and where and how.

In this connection, in 1957 – by which time he had for the most part abandoned his earlier neo-Kantian rationalism in favour of splicing phenomenology with Jungian psychoanalysis – Bachelard asks rhetorically, commentating in accents of Lovecraftian horror upon a poem by Henri Michaux: 'Where can one flee, where find refuge? In what shelter can one take refuge? Space is nothing but a "horrible outside-inside."'[375] A possible phantasmagorical pathology of the dialectic of inside and outside is that nauseating combination of claustrophobia and agoraphobia incited if the dialectic is posed wrongly. If the inside is thought of as *merely* a knot in the meaningless matter which constitutes the outside, then Spirit may

> fall from the *being of its shade* and mingle with the rumors of being, in the form of meaningless noise, of a confused hum that *cannot be located*. It once was. But wasn't it merely the noise that it has become? Isn't its punishment the fact of having become the mere echo of the meaningless, useless noise it once was? Wasn't it formerly what it is now: a sonorous echo from the vaults of hell?[376]

Bachelard is eminently clear that he is here in exegetical mode vis-à-vis the poem, not speaking in his own voice. Such 'nightmare'[377] phantasy-symptoms must certainly be made

[375] Bachelard, 'The Dialectics of Outside and Inside' excerpted from *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas, in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Clive Cazeaux, London/NY: Routledge, 2000, 151-163, 155.

[376] *Ibid.*

[377] *Ibid.*

explicit in order that the delusion be traversed. This traversal requires Hegel. An important part of finding a solution to the problem of nihilism will be that of thematizing the non-temporal *indifference* of the Absolute Idea (the Notion – *Begriff*) *to* the distinction between inside and outside. The Idea comes first and allows the distinction to be drawn. The Hegelian will be pugnacious on this point, and will say that those partisans of the pathos of finitude (we might think of Blanchot) who want to bludgeon spontaneity over the head with 'horrible' incapacitating 'uncanniness' must respond as to *why they believe there is any simple epistemic givenness of the outside which people are supposed to find scary*. In fact, there is none: the distinction is made via a norm-setting intervention, and norms themselves are utterly indifferent to it. It has to be justified rather than stipulated by a fiat which would pass itself off as the im-mediate squeeze of the supposed tentacles of substance. You cannot torture what is already a regime of torture – at least not with any metaphysical mandate.

In spite of a valiant and inspiring effort, it seems that Bachelard in 1957 remains caught in the geometrical fetishism which he himself puts into question[378]. On the one hand, he takes a step in the right direction by writing that 'language bears within itself the dialectics of open and closed. Through *meaning* it encloses, while through poetic expression, it opens up.'[379] This being said, we should replace the organicist 'poetic expression' with 'the movement of negation in general'. On the other hand, he backslides from this excellent formulation when he declares that

> [t]he phenomenology of the poetic imagination allows us to explore the being of man considered as the being of a *surface*, of the surface that separates the region of the same from the region of the other.[380]

This threatens to snowball into an unfortunate abuse of geometrical analogy which may end up pretending that thought is confined within a Lockean skull registering the impacts of simply-given outside bombardments. On the contrary, the movement of negation bears within itself the dialectics of open and closed because the movement of negation is the moment of the

---

[378] He quite clearly rails against 'the lazy certainties of the geometrical intuitions by means of which psychologists sought to govern the space of intimacy [i.e., of interiority, insideness]. Even figuratively, nothing that concerns intimacy can be shut in' (*Ibid.* 156. My interposition.).

[379] *Ibid.*, 157.

[380] *Ibid.*

rational force of inference and abduction – of disloyal-loyal normative commitment. The argument here proposed to the reader's scrutiny is that the denial of this question-beggingly contradicts itself, for *denying* is per se only forceful as a rational-normative act. Such is the optimistic side of the stance here defended.

6. *Contradiction and incommensurability*

For both Hegel and Marx freedom is effectuated in and through alienation. As Isaiah Berlin stresses in an essay famous in the anglophone sphere, 'freedom *from*' interference from the police and regulatory bodies or despotic monarchs, etc., is vapid without 'freedom *to*' *do something concrete*. In both Hegel and Marx, 'Externalization' (*Entäusserung*) is a term for the alienating activity conditioning freedom – there has to be some sort of unhinging, a strong *splitting* of subjectivity from nature – while 'estrangement' (*Entfremdung*) is a term for what happens when the creations of Spirit or active genus-being[381] – norms, customs, institutions, Real Abstractions such as the value-form and the commodity-form – harden and subject spontaneity rigidly to their law as to a foreign agency or power. But can the two moments easily be analytically separated, or pre-emptively distinguished in practice?[382] If *what* is alienated in the effectuation of freedom does not precede that alienation – as it cannot, because if activity were pre-determined then it would not be open-ended and hence could not be free, not even in principle or abstractly – this cannot but entail that creative alienation is *always* heteronomously conditioned, constituted through obstacle-resistances and affordances which were not of its own design, but with which it must work as its building-bricks, so to speak. Thus freedom can itself only be a type of bondage.

For Marx everything we are capable of ideating and self-consciously creating is constrained and enabled by social relations and practices of which we are in the first instance not conscious. Thus in Marx any heteronomous obstacle-affordance which can protrude itself as a candidate for being operationalized in an attempt to surpass inertia in a new creation will always turn out to have already been *an estrangement of our own activity*, a product of our own unconscious relations and practices in the social totality. So it can be said that the externalization which effectuates freedom can only be 'the estranging of estrangement.'[383] Or – a sloganization of this moment to which we hope to have earned the right – a wronging of wrongness.

---

[381] The capacity for transformation which the young Marx calls generic *Gattungswesen* (human species-being) is a genericity which Simon Skempton glosses as 'a negative and contentless universality; the overcoming of all specific determinacy' (Skempton, *Alienation after Derrida*, London/NY: 2010, 200.).

[382] Cf. Ray Brassier, 'Strange Sameness', *Angelaki* 24:1, 2019, 98-105.

[383] *Ibid.*, 103.

In deciding what strategy to pursue when trying to estrange an estrangement – by carrying out an artistic project, for example, or by elaborating a new scientific theory – what type of clues does one have to go on to help with spotting where the current opportunities are to be found? The Marxian argument is that no positive essence of what non-estranged activity looks like can be scried among the hodgepodge of 'facts' making up recorded history. From this vantage, to hold otherwise would be to reify a more or less arbitrarily selected string of made-not-given construals of supposed facticities into a supposedly necessary and linearly unfolding processual development. To the contrary, *what has happened* is opaque to us, and hence up for grabs.

Nonetheless, we have to explore the possibility of wagering a reasoned targeting of some hopeful pressure-point upon which to focus our efforts, otherwise we will simply be buffeted by the winds of neoliberalism's smooth functioning. Historical Materialism points out that to attempt to discern where one's current wiggle-room for freedom is – if one indeed has any – is to retrospectively unspool the past from the present, retrojecting previous heteronomous subjugations in the effort to judge whether any of these may be weaponizable now.[384] Marx formulates this point in the *Grundrisse*:

> The anatomy of the human being is the key to the anatomy of the ape. But the intimations of a higher animal in lower ones can be understood only if the animal of the higher order is already known. The bourgeois economy furnishes a key to ancient economy, etc. This is, however, by no means true of the methods of those economists who blot out all historical differences and see the bourgeois form in all forms of society. One can understand the nature of tribute, tithes, etc., after one has learned the nature of rent. But they must not be considered identical.[385]

I would like to suggest that this principle must be applied to the problem of 'progress' in the natural sciences.

Thomas Kuhn proposes that differing and opposed paradigms in the natural sciences, furnishing themselves with mutually irreconcilable methods, problem fields, and standards of

[384] Cf. *Ibid.*

[385] Marx, *Grundrisse*, excerpted in McLellan ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Oxford: OUP, 2000, 379-423, 390.

solution should be viewed as *incommensurable*[386]. Kuhn is hostile to the idea that scientific progress could be viewed as cumulative – one can even imagine him dismissing the term 'progress' as per se 'whiggish' – and he seemingly adheres to the logical principle of the excluded middle in maintaining that the clash between theories is along the lines of speakers of foreign languages lacking a translator, with nothing to be learned from *the specificities of the clash*. No doubt he is importantly right, in some respects, to insist upon the consequential facticity of incommensurability. For example, in order to ensure the revisability of any strut of the self-correcting knowing of nature, we will preserve the mathematizable properties of models produced by theories so that in the event that a given theory is negated by another the new one can remodel the natural invariancies established by the old one – and from this purely formal standpoint of juxtaposition-in-mutually-external-diversity we may well say that the new is incommensurable with the old and leave it at that. (And the clues of anomaly and malfunction in observation belong under the banner of incommensurability.)

But why would this imply that, *on the level of conceptual content*, we should be prevented from seeing determinate *contradictions*, and from seeing in these the truth of the natural sciences? After all, we must press on from the premiss we have attempted to argue, viz., that 'prediction' and other utilitarian goals are bogus as indexes of scientific Truth.

Kuhn cites Alexandre Koyré as an inspiration. But Koyré is, in many respects, a Hegelien. In Hegel's *Logic* we read this:

> *[T]houghtful* reason sharpens, as it were, the blunt difference of diverse terms, the mere manifold of representation, to *essential* distinction, to *opposition*. Only when driven to the extreme of contradiction are the many of that manifold quickened and alive to each other: they hold the negativity in them which is the inner pulse of self-movement and life.

And further down on the same page:

> [...] if a contradiction can be pointed out in something, by itself this is still not, as it were, a blemish, not a defect or failure. On the contrary, every determination, anything concrete, every concept, is essentially a unity of distinguished and distinguishable elements which,

[386] For example, Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 103.

> by virtue of the *determinate, essential difference*, pass over into elements which are contradictory.[387]

It seems clear that Koyré was rarely satisfied to loiter dragging his heels in the purely formal antechamber of incommensurability – is he not rather a sharpener of *antagonistic contradictions*? And in his work it is – in spite of the expositional conveniences of using the names of theorists as stand-ins for Ideas, and the heuristic of martial comparisons – the *concepts themselves* which are *antagonistic* with each other, rather than a sociologized and biographologized cohort of fratricidal careerist scientists plying their powers of persuasive seduction and vying to outdo each other in utilitarianism, as in Kuhn.

In a programmatic 1955 essay entitled 'Influence of Philosophic Trends on the Formulation of Scientific Theories', Koyré casts an eye back at an earlier interpretation of his. Not only are rival theories instructively in contradiction with each other; moreover, *within* any single research-programme the epistemic force of the programme is held in the torsion of its *internal contradictions*:

> Fifteen years ago, I called the revolution of the 17th century 'la revanche de Platon' ['Plato's revenge']. But, as a matter of fact, it was an alliance, an alliance with Democritus, that decided the old strife and enabled Plato to defeat Aristotle.
>
> Strange alliance! Yet we know that not only in the history of philosophy or ideas but also in history *tout court* these strange alliances of seemingly, or even really, incompatible elements occur more often than not. The enemies of our enemies are our friends. Thus the Very Christian King of France allied himself with the Khalifa of Islam, Commander of the Faithful. Or to come back to the history of philosophico-scientific thought, what is more strange than the alliance of Mach and Einstein?
>
> Democritean atoms in the space of Plato or of Euclid: one understands that Newton needed a God in order to maintain the connection between the elements of his universe; one understands, also, the rather curious character of this universe (the 19th century was too accustomed to it to be able to notice its strangeness) whose material elements, objects of a theorectical extrapolation of the experience [*sic.*], swim or are immersed, *without being affected by it*, in the nothingness of

[387] Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. Giovanni, 384.

> absolute space – a real and even necessary and eternal *non ens* – object of *a priori* intellectual knowledge.[388]

Newton was *not* the phenomenalistic-pragmatist-positivist-legalistic skeptical passive tracker of observations which what has been called today's 'Big Data Ideology' would have him be, this currently burgeoning Ideology thereby resounding with Quine and Duhem, who deny that the torsion of contradiction plays a determinatively forceful role in the rendering-intelligible of the observable phenomenon, let alone in the construction of knowledge. Nor was his recourse to God straightforwardly a matter of aprioristic principle: while Newton is not Bacon or Comte, he is also not Malebranche. Malebranche, not Newton, is the ancestor of the contemporary positivism which thinks low-level computers processing large quantities of inputted information could produce new knowledge, just as Duhem is its recent uncle. Koyré's argument is far from denying that the modern natural sciences are constitutively 'mathematized'; on the contrary, he points to the conclusion that the *choice* between numbers (supposedly only for tracking and predicting) and hearty metaphysical concepts like curved space and forces (supposedly automatically palpable and effective) is a recherché blackmail.[389]

Koyré believes that the positivist renunciation of explanation – the renunciation of the determination or building of the concrete Law which can be said to be effectively inherent in the real and which *explains* the phenomena – is a retreat which will always sooner or later be swept away; or rather, which sooner or later *ought to be*. Newton himself was not satisfied with action-at-a-distance across the void, and hence Einstein's proposed solution to this problem pressurizes and leverages a tension already present in Newton.[390] But what this means is that 'paradigms' do

---

[388] Alexandre Koyré, 'Influence of Philosophic Trends on the Formulation of Scientific Theories', *The Scientific Monthly* 80:2, 1955, 107-111, 109. My interpositions.

[389] Echoing the Bachelard of *The Formation of the Scientific Mind* (1947), who found 'mathematism' to be formative rather than descriptive, and contemporary physics to eschew the phenomenological-legalist *how* in favour of the mathematical *why* (Koyré, *Ibid.*, 111.):

> [I]t was not the positivist renunciation, nor the pressure of technical development of mathematical and experimental methods and procedures, but a philosophical attitude, that of *mathematical realism*, that has been the driving force or source of inspiration of the post-Newtonian development of scientific thought, the root of the concept of 'field', that new key-concept of which Einstein has shown us the capital value for present-day science. (Koyré, *Ibid.*, 111.)

[390] In the French version of the essay, which is longer than its English counterpart, Koyré addends to this story (Koyré, 'De l'influence des conceptions philosophiques sur l'évolution des théories scientifiques', 244.):

not – on the level of the question of truth – consign one another exclusively to disjunctive banishment. Rather, as regards the question of truth, natural science is a boxing ring in which propositions and judgements – concepts not people – fight each other, the determinacies of the sparring being the concretion.

> The spontaneous motion of bodies, as we know full well since Einstein, is quite normal, provided that, of course, the space is conveniently curved; and we know too, or at least believe we know, that our universe is by no means infinite (although it has no boundaries) and that 'outside' this universe there is strictly nothing, just because there is no 'outside' to the world, and all world-space is 'inside'.
>
> Now this is precisely what – somewhat clumsily because he did not have at his disposal the resources of Riemannian geometry – Aristotle has been teaching us [*sic.*]. Outside the world, he said, there is *nothing*, pure nothing, neither *plenum* nor *vacuum*, neither place nor space, because all the space – that is, all the places where something can be – is *inside*.
>
> The Aristotelian conception is, of course, not mathematical; this is its weakness, but also its strength. It is a metaphysical one. The world of Aristotle is not a mathematically curved world; it is, so to speak, a metaphysically curved world.[391]

> I could, I believe – if I had time – present, drawn from other scientific domains, other decidedly parallel cases of development. We could, for example, follow the development of thermodynamics since Carnot and Fourier – it is by the way well known that it was Fourier's lectures which inspired Auguste Comte – and see what it became in the hands of Maxwell, Boltzmann, and Gibbs; without forgetting the reaction – so significant in its perfect unsuccess – of Duhem.

[391] Further down on the same page, we read that Medieval philosophers such as Henricus of Ghent did not fail to point out to their readers, vis-à-vis Aristotelian cosmology, that

> they were using difficult metaphysical reasonings and concepts, and that those who were not sufficiently trained in, or gifted for, metaphysical thinking and who could not rise above the level of geometric imagining, could not understand Aristotle; they would continue to ask: What is outside the world? What will happen if we push a stick through the surface of the ultimate heavenly sphere? (Koyré, 'Influence of Philosophic Trends', 108.)

Speaking of incommensurability here – while important on one level – is only informative up to a certain point, or only tells one part of the story, because – we claim – *contradiction is the truth of science*. Science is torsion. The goal of the natural sciences must be *the production of new contradictions*. To produce new contradictions is to effectuate the destitution of the Myth of the Given.

To put the point in a more sober register: it is widely accepted that there is a question to be answered regarding the 'unity' of the natural sciences, regarding, for example, the issue of bridging the gulf of incompatibility between quantum mechanics and general relativity. But to bring Hegel and Marx to bear upon this issue is to question the hard-and-fast line of demarcation which Kuhn sets up between 'normal science' – business as usual within a paradigm that has already been established – and 'revolutionary science' – the creation of a new paradigm. It is to suggest that the contradictions present in 'normal science' may furnish clues as to what lines of attack to take when aiming to surpass that 'normality'. It is to suggest that one should not shy off from affirming that the moment of 'revolutionary' creation destitutes the logical principle of the excluded middle by determinately negating old contradictions and making a Newly cognized noumenon pop out of the oven. Hence the argument here is that the question of 'progress' or of 'surpassing' or 'supersession' in scientific knowledge should not be posed without acknowledging that such contradictions as the following carrying a force of truth:

- Biological teleology *vs* thermodynamic dissipation.
    - Biology is a science which may be necessary for prosecuting the de-substantialization of death. It has to assume organic teleology, but the contradictions holding between biology, chemistry, and physics will have to be (*ought* to be) determinately negated.
- The non-directional, reversible space-time of Einsteinian physics *vs* the irreversible temporality of biological decay, of the frailty of the organic, and of the Boltzmannain 'heat death' of a thermodynamic system.
    - Perhaps one should take inspiration from McTaggart and use Einstein to portray time as – instead of being 'noumenally real' – simply a facet of space. Perhaps, but should we not rather say that Einstein does *not* simply *trash* Boltzmann's paradigm hook, line and sinker. Is it not better to say that while yes, he negates it, *still the contradiction between them lingers*?

In any case, we cannot *reduce* political-historical ruptured and rupturing time to *any* other type of temporality. In 1982 Badiou riffs – playing on the best of Althusserianism, at a moment

when he is also embracing Hegel! – that 'history does not exist (it would be a figure of the whole). Only historical periods or historicizations (figures of the One-of-the-two) exist.'[392] The sciences – including the Science of Logic – are, step by step, constructed and forced into determinacy through decisions wherein no criteria are available save those which other decisions are able to set for them. The sciences belong to historical temporality.

7. *Historical-materialist pessimism and historical-materialist optimism*

What is cozily optimistic about our argument here is, if we may speak polemically, that it bridles against and seeks to negate the theatrical pessimism of that historicist dandyism which would pick out and reify some moment from the historical record, claiming to unspool the present from the past in an attempt to naysay the acidic-and-productive flow of negativity in the historical Now. Our knowledge of the past, as of any causal relations between grounds and consequents, and as of the conceptual articulation of any concept, is constructed and reconstructed *now*. Therefore, the attempt to disarm contemporary strategizing made by what one can call 'global genealogical skepticism'[393] is engaged in a question-begging performative contradiction. We earlier affirmed a parallel 'optimism of principle' against the pessimism of the Adorno of 1938. So is everything hunky-dory and ship-shape when it comes to our creative powers of negation then? Arguably not. The engine of negation is indeed guttering, and running only in fits and starts, due to estrangement through the exchange-abstraction, the value-form, and the commodity-form. This is the less cheerful Marxian side of this line of thinking. The inability to surpass contradictions in theory (into new contradictions) must be chalked up to jammed contradictions

---

[392] Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans., Bruno Bosteels, London/NY: Continuum, 2009 [1982], 92. It should be noted that, in the jargon of Marx, an abstract *whole* is not the same thing as a concrete *totality*. A 'One-of-the-two' is what shows up in an antagonistic totality, a rupture periodized *now* by the historical materialist grappling with the historical record (we quoted Dolar citing the same idea in Chapter 2). This book by Badiou is in fact the central inspiration of the approach taken in this chapter, and of the idea of *qualitative torsion* generally, although we above saw this idea already cropping up in Hyppolite's reading of Hegel.

We can also cite Adorno in *Negative Dialectics* (trans. Ashton, NY/London: 1973, 359; translation modified; Adorno cites his own 1932 lecture, 'The Idea of Natural History':

> [...] it is incumbent upon thought, rather, to view all nature, and whatever would install itself as such, as history, and all history as nature – 'to comprehend historical being in its most extreme historical determinacy, where it is most historical, as natural being, or if it were possible to comprehend nature as an historical being where it seems to rest most deeply in itself as nature.'

[393] To his credit, this phrase is Robert Brandom's.

in non-self-conscious social practice. The conditions of production, in science as elsewhere, are the shape of social practices and relations. Hazarding the necessary task of conjecturally uncoiling, from the present, a kick-off point in the prehistoric past, Marx and Engels write that the

> tribal consciousness receives its further development and extension through increased productivity, the increase of needs, and, what is fundamental to both of these, the increase of population. With these there develops the division of labour, which was originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act, then that division of labour which develops spontaneously or 'naturally' by virtue of natural disposition (e.g. physical strength), needs, accidents, etc. etc. Divison of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. (The first form of ideologists, priests, is concurrent.) From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatter itself that it is consciousness of something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of 'pure' theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc. But even if this theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc. comes into contradiction with the existing relations, this can only occur because existing social relations have come into contradiction with existing forces of production [...].[394]

Like any type of creativity, scientific creativity is a collective affair, and is socially conditioned. It will not be fully unleashed save in the case of the overcoming of the hampering contradictions, consequent upon the development of the division of labour, between theory and practice and between particular and common interests. And yet, would it not be self-indulgent to wallow in the disconsolate side of the argument, especially if accepted that the optimistic side has debunked the idea that Spirit could ever owe a debt to its own blockages of itself as to an exterior authority, and if accepted that it has refuted that Real Abstractions such as the commodity-form could ever be the type of thing that could hamstring the functional operativity of our faculties with a metaphysical dagger or shut them off from nature with a metaphysical screen (as opposed

[394] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, excerpted in ed. McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 175-208, 184.

to a screen which is permeably epistemic, *à la* Sellars and Hegel)? Against the pessimism of some branches of contemporary Marxism – which we earlier worked towards challenging by using Kant, Hegel, and Lacan to hold the exiled Californian Adorno, so to speak, to his own standards – our argument is that construction-discovery and determinate negation *are* still possible under the planetary regime of the extraction of surplus value. But – quite apart from the other injustices of this regime – the *development* of these capacities, or of completely new types of them, *is* constrained in a way that it *need not necessarily* be.

What is more, to allow the somewhat 'earthy' overtones of the above quotation from Marx and Engels to give the impression that the thrust of their intervention is (or should be) kicking *against* the prospect that ideation ideating ideation can be, and is, a *practice* which can still yield new contents would be a grave error. The insouciant flippancy of this subsection is in truth unearned – for we have not yet capped off a response to the problem of 'progress' that would be able to claim to motivate the imperative to surpass without relying on 'whiggish' presuppositions. An attempt at this will be made in the Conclusion, where the Problem of Novelty – viz., 'the New must be something other than a quantity "optimizable" along the lines of neoliberal managerialism, because if not it will merely be ventriloquized by abstract exchange-value and the incompletable phantasm of a self-replenishing surplus for skimming' – will also be gamely attacked.

But the hunch regarding the continued in-principle fecund surprisingness of ideation ideating its own 'pure' concoctions gives us the opportunity, in order to take the final step in this direction, to clear up some unfinished business regarding *mathematics*.

Indeed, when Marx and Engels say, regarding the unhinged laboratories of '"pure" theory', that – if we may paraphrase them in Nietzschean – the oppression insinuated by the priesthood 'can only occur because existing social relations have come into contradiction with existing forces of production', does this not imply that they believe that there is such thing as a specifically intellectual force of production untethered from actuality conceived in antiquated materialist terms on a piston-pumping hydraulic model? Do they not *need* to allow the possibility that effectivity is detached from this idea of actuality?

Is the unhinged a tractional hinge for, or as, spontaneity?

8. *Mathematical heteronomy: in pursuit of Albert Lautman's mission*

In a book published just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Albert Lautman gives a diagnosis of a certain error made by the Vienna Circle and its anglophone associates: that of mistaking mathematical practice for a limited neighborhood of mathematised logic.

> [T]he development of the notion of tautology in Russel's school completely eliminated the idea of a reality specific to mathematics. For

> Wittgenstein and Carnap, mathematics is no more than a language that is indifferent to the content that it expresses. Only empirical propositions refer to an objective reality, and mathematics is only a system of formal transformations allowing the data of physics to connect to each other. If one tries to understand the reasons for this progressive disappearance of mathematical reality, one may be led to conclude that it results from the use of the deductive method. By trying to construct all mathematical notions from a small number of notions and primitive logical propositions, we lose sight of the *qualitative* and integral character of the constituted theories.[395]

During a 1935 colloquium Lautman cites the Platonic participation of the sensible in the intelligible, such as to indicate his dissatisfaction with the strategy that would try to separate the sensible from the intelligible while still claiming that the former, thus isolated, could give us anything to talk about.

> There is therefore no reason to maintain the distinction made by the Vienna Circle between rational knowledge and intuitive experience, between *Erkennen* and *Erleben*. In wanting to suppress the connections between thought and reality, as in refusing to give to science the value of a spiritual experience, the risk is to have only a shadow of science, and to push the mind in search of the real back towards the violent attitudes in which reason has no part. This is a resignation that the philosophy of science must not accept.[396]

If mathematical practice constructs-discovers an *autonomous* reality, and so is not simply the hollow reshuffling of formal-logical principles, what this means is that it must be shown to be able to bring to light new and 'surprising' knowledge – new and surprising determinations. Its elaborations do not regurgitate their inputs in varying combinations, but knock into concretely constraining truths which cannot otherwise be unearthed or built up.

---

[395] Albert Lautman, *Essay on the Notions of Structure and Existence in Mathematics* in Lautman, *Mathematics, Ideas and the Physical Real*, trans. Simon B. Duffy, London/NY: Continuum, 2011 [1938], 87-193, 87. My emphasis.

[396] Lautman, 'Mathematics and Reality. Presentation to the International Congress on Scientific Philosophy, Paris 1935', in *Mathematics, Ideas and the Physical Real*, 9-12, 12.

However, how to make good on this mission philosophically is far from obvious. Our contention in this final subsection before our Conclusion is that the marriage of Hegel with Sellars and Marx allows for certain red lines to be drawn over which lines the mission should not stray, in order not to betray its own goal. What is at stake, we claim, is, firstly – and in the highfaluting language we have tasked the reader with enduring – Spirit's non-subjugation to obstacles other than those issuing out of its own practice and relation-to-self, and secondly, the highly important question of *completeness*.

Raging against the positivistic logical atomism to which the Vienna Circle's error arguably will tend to lead, Gilles Châtelet – a thinker of mathematics, physics, and politics interested both in what Deleuze has to say and in what Badiou has to say – resonates with our ultra-(Schellingo-)Hegelianizing ramping up of Lakatos and Koyré, and – by nodding to the legitimacy of allusive or analogical or metaphorical creativity in theory-creation – with our insistence upon *opacity*, in underlining the urgent need to come up with a

> way of conceiving information which would not be committed solely to communication, but would aim at a rational grasp of allusion and of the learning of learning. The latter, of course, would be far removed from the neuronal barbarism which exhausts itself in hunting down the recipient of thought and in confusing learning with a pillaging of informational booty.[397]

One strategy, among others, pursued to this end by Châtelet is that of thematizing the *gesture* – the *act* of diagramming: of drawing – through which geometry articulates itself and constructs *new* geometrical determinacies.[398] What is in our opinion salutary here is the attack upon the cynicism wielded by the pathos of finitude and the fetishization of Absolute alterity and impossibility so dear to certain post-Heideggerian strands. However, while Châtelet provides a wealth of deep nuances regarding the non-predictable moments of diagrammatic production in the history of contemporary physics and geometry, there are moments in his discourse regarding the gesture which give pause. He is no doubt right that the *drawing of lines* – loops, corkscrews, knots, stripes, dotted lines – and the defamiliarizing use of these diagrams to negate and expand 'commonsensical' or quotidian conceptualizations of spatio-temporal relations, and to thereby

[397] Gilles Châtelet, *Figuring Space: Philosophy, Mathematics, and Physics*, trans. Robert Shore and Murial Zagha, Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer, 2000 [1993], 14.

[398] For the inspiration of the response to Châtelet offered here see Matt Hare and Ben Woodard, 'Anti-Eureka', *Glassbead*, 2017, http://www.glass-bead.org/article/anti-eureka/?lang=enview.

emit hypotheses regarding electro-magnetic interactions, played an important role in what is new in the 'second scientific revolution' of the nineteenth century, from Ampère through Faraday to Maxwell.[399] Indeed, such a proposal meets the exigency of post-Hegelian historical materialism whereby the intelligibility of anything that is intelligible cannot be taken to have been always given and obvious but is an intelligibility which *has become*, and which gains operativity only *under conditions of effectivity*. However, one must be weary of isolating any intuitable determination from the full-bloodedly conceptual presuppositions and decisions without which it is but a fleeting and brittle bit of stuff viewed merely in a vantage of banal spatio-temporal exteriority whereby the stain-singularity is simply identitical-to-itself. Intelligible *relations* are, per se, conceptual. They are mediated as opposed to self-presenting. The Sellarso-Hegelian worry, at certain moments, is that Châtelet isolates the diagram in an artificial immediacy and *aestheticizes* it. Thus knot-theory in geometry is said to involve a '*revenge* of the hand', 'a victory of the hand that comments on itself, the indexation no longer being delivered by an external "set", but by a process of deformation and modification of diagrams.'[400] And it is said that

> a diagram can transfix a gesture, bring it to rest, long before it curls up into a sign, which is why modern geometers and cosmologers like diagrams with their peremptory power of evocation. They capture gestures mid-flight; for those capable of attention, they are the moments where being is glimpsed smiling.[401]

It is highly promising to stress that the intelligibility of a geometrical construction is not subservient to any particular semantic regime – the properties of the drawing can be viewed in a vantage of exteriority such that they do not represent anything and are entirely meaningless, but nonetheless qualitatively differentiated, and thereby ripe as candidates for contentful spontaneity. Indeed, one must recognize that this is precisely what happens in 'purely mathematical' geometry.

However, that Châtelet wants to speak in this register of the 'applied' deployment of geometry in the natural sciences – physics and cosmology – is problematic. Physics is always a semantic-cartographic *representational* regime. Diagrams on their own are never sufficient to

[399] Châtelet, *Figuring Space*, 157-186.

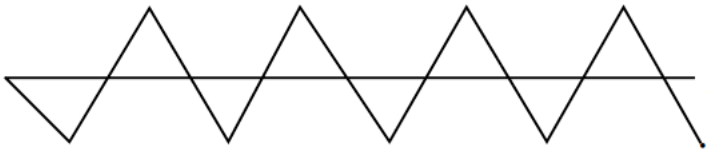
[400] Châtelet, 'Interlacing the Singularity, the diagram and the metaphor', ed. Charles Alunni, trans. Simon Duffy in Simon Duffy ed. *Virtual Mathematics: the Logic of Difference*, Manchester: Clinamen, 2006, 31-45, 36.

[401] Châtelet, *Figuring Space*, 10.

create a new physical theory. They are always mediated by a battery of presupposed laws and discursively-made differentiations.

It seems to us that then the pertinent criticism of Châtelet on this point is that his welcome affirmation of natural science and mathematics as a vector of freedom is undermined *when* it slips into an affirmation of the mere appearance or semblance of freedom. Would this not be a Romantic regression? Schiller, in the 'Kallias Letters', proposes a definition: 'Beauty is […] nothing less than freedom in appearance.'[402] What is freedom? Freedom is autonomous self-determination, and Schiller defines this by the form of a thing's movement originating in its own constitutive nature. A tired old workhouse is less beautiful than a Spanish palfrey because the trot of the workhorse is bowed clumsily by the heteronomy of gravity exerted through the heavy weights it is accustomed to pulling, whereas the pulchritudinous palfrey has never been obliged to exert any more effort than it feels like exerting, and hence its more aristocratic amble all but glides along in the flourishing of a nature that has been left to its own devices.[403]

Without dwelling on the Aristotelian type of essentialism here on display, let us pass to a quasi-geometrical or geometry-adjacent example given by Schiller. According to him, this line is not 'beautiful':



whereas, this one is:



because the second, curvy line changes direction with unnoticed smoothness whereas the first does so *ex abrupto*. A sudden change of direction appears *as if* violently imposed from without. The curvy line thus *seems* – appears to be – free to determine itself. If 'beauty' is the

[402] Friedrich Schiller, 'Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner' (1793) in ed. J. M. Bernstein, *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics*, Cambridge: CUP, 2003, 145-183, 152.

[403] *Ibid.*, 163-164.

appearance of freedom, and if the above reasoning is accepted, then the curved line is beautiful and the spiky line is not.[404]

But 'beauty' is only of incidental relevance in science (and only of dialectically circumscribed relevance in art). If the Châtelian moments cited above were to be found to be relying on criteria such as those outlined in Schiller's Kallias Letters, this would be a problem. The act is not transparent to itself. The Schillerian position is Kantian rather than Hegelian: it assumes a hard separation of kind between the conceptual – which it takes to be active – and intuition – which it takes to be *passively* receptive.[405] However, following Hegel and Sellars, intuition, when it is intuition of something *as* something (*as* curved or jagged) is, as we have seen, neither non-conceptual nor passive. There is no such thing as passively receiving an intuition – intuitions are actively *produced* by the faculties, which is to say by self-knowing Spirit, which is to say by picturing and the self-correcting enterprise that is knowing (which is to say, in the clutches of commodity-fetishism). What this means for geometry and topology is that a new discovery *cannot* present itself other than as mediated by full-bloodedly conceptual-discursive definitions, postulates, and rules. Danielle Macbeth argues this regarding ancient Greek diagrammatic practice, but I would struggle to see in what way something similar could be denied of Châtelet's justifiably favored domain of interest in contemporary topology, Knot theory.

> To demonstrate a truth, or a construction, in Greek mathematical practice just is to find a diagram, constructed according to the rules set out in the postulates and any previously demonstrated problems, that provides a path from one's starting point to the desired endpoint. To discover such a diagram is to reveal a connection between concepts that is made possible by the definitions, postulates, and common notions that Euclid sets out but is not already there, even if only implicitly, in those definitions, postulates, and common notions. It is only the diagram, itself fully actualized as the diagram it is as one reasons through it, regarding aspects of it now this way and now that as scripted by the *apodeixis* [the text which retells what has been discovered through the diagram], that actualizes the potential of Euclid's starting points to yield something new.[406]

[404] *Ibid.*, 172-173.

[405] *Ibid.*, 148-149.

[406] Danielle Macbeth, *Realizing Reason: A Narrative of Truth and Knowing*, Oxford: OUP, 2014, 105.

To turn the knot's drawing into something self-sufficient would be counterproductive.

For this reason, and others to be developed below, Sellarso-Marxian practice kicks against Châteleian gesture. The former, qua practical action, is, in-itself, opaque to knowledge and intuition. Thus creation is never a rendering-transparent of the act, but *always* an 'externalization' (*Entäusserung*). The hand cannot comment directly upon itself. Geometrical determinacies are fraught with ought. It seems that Châtelet verges on implying that the hand can 'give itself its own law', as Schiller's handsome horse and curvy line *appear* to. But if we take this at face value – whether regarding pure or applied mathematics – do we not end up in a scenario of banal tautology such as that to which Lautman objects in Russel and the Vienna Circle? New surprises necessarily presuppose a 'detour' through *heteronomony* as the condition of autonomy, autonomy being the freedom *to* discover them. Externalization when not banal must be heteronomously grounded: determined by factors which it has not itself determined.

Posing this issue with regard to mathematics may seem slightly curious, for it will have been noted that our sympathies, or our tastes, lie with those such as Badiou and Lautman who affirm with trenchancy the *autonomy* of mathematical practice. But the alleyway down which a fog lamp is to be shone is that, through recourse to Hegel, alongside a splicing of Sellars with Marx, it may turn out that the heteronomy *here* at stake is not that of an alien power but is an *immanent* heteronomy.

The Hegelian proposal is that the fact that mathematics – the axiomatic science of pure form – harbours surprising truths is rendered intelligible when we get rid of the hard, undialectical oppositive exclusion between form and content. The Hegelian definition of the essence of mathematics will be that it approaches determinations from a vantage of exteriority which is indifferent to qualitative difference, and proceeds to try to learn about the properties and relations pertaining among determinacies thus approached through the stipulation of axioms governing their active manipulation. But the point is that that this 'exteriority' itself, qua exteriority, turns out to be, as such, itself structured by qualitative differences which can only be revealed through this type of procedure. We do not scrap the form/content distinction (as the young Badiou of *The Concept of Model* wanted to); rather, form – what is immediately given, or what is approached in a vantage of indifferent exteriority – through the procedure which mediates it may 'flip over' into content – the new and non-predicted relational properties discovered through actions upon the form, which properties were indiscernible on the level of immediacy.

Mathematics is *not* 'purely quantitative': mathematical 'pure form' – where limits are indifferently stipulated[407] – can and does yield a form/content distinction and many *qualitative* differentiations, as pointed out by Lautman in the quotation which opened this subsection. In speaking of the distinction between form and content in pure mathematics, the Hegelian crucially

[407] Cf. *supra.*, Chapter 6.

is not talking about a naïve correspondence-theory style strategy for drawing this distinction which would have form as some kind of procrustean lattice, or even a plastic goo or wax, into which a pre-given, already concretized fine-grained corporeal 'matter' would be stuffed or onto which it would be impressed. The Hegelian will therefore *not* be talking about moments which only superficially seem to fit the bill, such as when mathematicians working on fractals use them to gauge the dimension of the highly irregular and non-orderly coastline of the British Isles, nor the distinction between model and domain in model-theory. Rather, in mathematics, 'content' will be viewed, through a post-Cantorian update of Hegel, as nothing other than the *new* relations and properties – the *new* determinacies; the new *qualitative* distinctions – pertaining to the characteristics and relations of and among *forms themselves*.

Who could have predicted that the proof of Fermat's Last Theorem would involve the connection between elliptic curves and modular forms, as Andrew Wiles discovered? Who the peculiar dimensionality – between a line and a plane – of the Von Koch fractal itself? And, perhaps most relevantly in the context of this study, who that set theory – the *most* 'exteriorized', the 'driest', field of mathematics – would allow Cantor, via the diagonalization argument, to prove the actuality of *qualitatively differing* magnitudes of infinity (e.g., countable vs uncountable)? In all of these cases the moment which yields a *content* is the moment when mere exteriority – non-mediated (immediate) form; in mathematics, form qua indifferent form – is, so to speak, 'pierced', and a 'surprising' 'noumenal interiority' is brought to light. The Hegelian vocable 'noumenal interiority' thus has nothing to do with any naïve geometrical or topological fetishism lazily taking for granted any particular way of drawing the inside-outside line; rather, in the case of mathematics, the noumenon is 'penetrated' (this is a metaphor) when immediacy is mediated through axiomatizing acts of construction such as to tumble over into the articulation of qualitative properties of form qua form which could only be articulated (constructed-discovered) through such mathematical acts. Hegel's sniffy tone in discussing mathematics in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* has gained him the reputation, depending on who one speaks to, either of an anti-maths philistine or of a smotherer of maths in a warmer panpsychist soup. But in fact both prongs of this bad reputation are, to an extent, belied by a reading of the three long 'Remarks' on mathematics at the end of the chapter on Quantum in the *Logic*[408].

If one wants to agree with Lautman's mission statement, we would claim that the just-sketched Hegelian shape – as impoverished and threadbare-formal as it is – is a necessary one. The suggestion is that the shape *needs* to be skeletal and unsubstantial, in order to allow Sellars to be put to work alongside Marx by way of negatively drawing a red line – and such as to bring us back to Sellars' criticisms of Quine.

[408] Especially the first Remark on the mathematical infinite and the infinitesimal, *Logic*, 204-234.

One solution to the problem of the difficulty of understanding the bindingness of mathematical truth, a solution proposed by Lautman himself, is that of wedding Heidegger to Plato such as to postulate pairs of dialectical Ideas or structure-schemas – local/global, intrinsic/extrinsic, essence/existence, continuous/discontinuous, finite/infinite – in the site of mathematical Being-as-such (and, indeed, it seems, in physico-natural Being-as-such), which dialectical Ideas, so to speak, 'twist' Problems (the capitalization is Deleuze's) into the structuration of the mathematical field. The problems are only defined as such through the work on and with mathematical existents – beings with a small 'b' – by means of which they are at the same time resolved. Jean Cavaillès joins Lautman in what we believe to be this highly important affirmation of the Absoluteness of mathematical truth. Among Cavaillès' proposals in pursuit of the mission is a suggestion glancing at Spinoza's 'idea of the idea'[409], followed by the programmatic recommendation of an untrammeled 'philosophy of the concept'[410] which would recognize the pure necessity discernible in the dialectic of mathematico-logical production, divesting itself of the Kantian and later-Husserlian erroneous obsession with an otiose 'consciousness', otiose because wrongly assumed to be auto-illuminating, self-transparent[411].

Our proposal here is quite vague, but is by way of indicating an avenue to-be-explored: namely, that Sellars and Marx may allow us to embrace the thrust of Lautman and Cavaillès' critical angles and speculative assertion of absoluteness while rejecting their respective recourse to the Heideggerian given of a self-concealing unconcealment within givenness as such, and to the Spinozist defenestration of subjectivity's for-itself negativity with its attendant a-substantiality and persistent wrongness. This is, at least, an open question and our proposal is, at least, a hunch for its development. What the Sellaro-Marxian perspective will not accept is *the ontologizing separation of mathematical posits from practice*. We – practitioners – have created the mathematical problems and properties ourselves. We have not received them from any simply exterior exteriority, be it a problematic rift happening through the giving of the given or a Spinozist-metaphysical clear and distinct axiomatic-'Euclidean' apodictic unfolding. Indeed, the latter would hardly be a fair gloss as concerns the nuances of Cavaillès' sketched research programme: his reference to Spinoza is glancing (which is not to claim that it is not important), and he is certainly right to reject 'consciousness' brandished as a spurious non-explanatory

[409] Jean Cavaillès, *Sur la logique et la théorie de la science*, eds. Canguilhem & Ehresmann, Paris: Vrin, 2008, 34.

[410] *Ibid.*, 90.

[411] Cf. *ibid.*, 19.

abstraction. No doubt Cavaillès and Lautman harbour resources pertinent to any philosophico-mathematical enquiry (and it can be noted that Cavaillès approvingly cites Hegel against Kant[412]). But this is not the stake here.

The stake here is that of insisting with Hegel that the movement of negativity proper to 'substance becoming subject' cannot be blotted out without losing the capacity of mathematics to yield surprising contents. And with Marx and Sellars it must be insisted that the formal (the determination of forms and of the forms of forms) is a limiting case of the functional, such that the mathematical act, in its real qualitative distinction from the representational or meaning-making semantic act, is nonetheless not *metaphysically* separated from them.

That Sellars' attack upon the vulgar Platonism of Quine does not to his mind rule out a heteroclite non-vulgar Platonism can be witnessed in this dense and rich passage, notwithstanding the slightly confusing politeness he shows to Russel:

> There are many who will feel, as apparently Vlastos does, that Platonic Ideas without Self-Predication have ceased to be Platonic Ideas; that without Self-Predication they are of merely logical interest and have ceased to define a metaphysics, a way of construing Man in the World. Nothing could be further from the truth. The heart of the Platonic tradition lies not in a picturesque realm where Horseness is a horse, Triangularity a triangle, and Courage a... (a what?), but rather in the conception of a domain of eternal (atemporal) objects which the human mind can 'apprehend' or 'see', and the interconnections of which, open at least in part to human inspection, constitute the fundamental principles of the World of Becoming. That one can speak in a logician's language of universals, particulars, and their mutual relationships and yet share this Platonic conception is made manifest by Bertrand Russel's 'A Free Man's Worship'. [...] The conception of the human mind as apprehending 'abstract entities' has usually been construed (and, I think, reasonably so) to support a straightforward mind-body dualism and to fit harmoniously with a theistic cosmology. That it is a mistake has not prevented it from

[412] At *ibid*., 21. The citation is of Hegel's comment that a *content*, material, or 'matter' '*without the concept*, is something void of concept and therefore void of essence' (Hegel, *Logic*, 524.).

being one of the central threads around which have crystallized the values of civilized Western man.[413]

The epistemology is one of *qualitative differences among invariancies*, and the metaphysics is a metaphysics of the lopsided dialectic between the self-opaque Act and self-conscious knowledge. With respect to mathematics, the lineage Hegel-Marx-Sellars obliges one to pose constructivist Platonism as the desideratum. The question then would be: is there any other option than to avow that triangles can only be *normatively individuated*? But then, one would have run out of sluicegates with which to dam up the intermingling of the socially conditioned non-being external icepick of the *ought* (in one guise, the norm: having a bizarre type of actuality, whatever its effectivity) and the knowing of atemporal Ideas (of which the actuality is tricky if not unacceptable for many anti-Hegelians).

In order to start testing out the Hegelian collapse in mathematics of apodicticity and cognitive ampliativeness[414], and in order to touch upon the question of completeness, let us, before moving to conclude the study, very quickly and cursorily look at a couple of points made by Hegel concerning the mathematical infinite in the abovementioned first of the three Remarks closing the *Logic's* chapter on Quantum.

The first point to be noted is a classic exemplification of a bad and a good infinity. Listing whole numbers – 1, 2, 3, … – gives you a string of units which are indifferent to each other; the only qualitative relation here is that of indifference: mutual exteriority. This is not the case with a fraction such as 2/7. Here the 2 and the 7 are not indifferent to each other, because each is a mere moment which is determined only in relation to the other. You can substitute in different numbers – 4/14, 6/21, *ad infinitum* – and the *qualitative character* of the relation remains the same. 2/7 can be expressed as a decimal series, but one that goes on forever: 0.285714… For reasons which we have studied, this endless series is a bad, non-completable infinity[415]. The fraction 2/7, however, is a good mathematical infinity, a truly infinite expression, because its moments are 'reflected into each other' without anything missing or leftover outside of their

[413] Sellars, 'Vlastos and "The Third Man"' in Sellars, *Philosophical Perspectives: History of Philosophy*, Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1977, 18-39, 39.

[414] Danielle Macbeth uses Kant and Frege to argue for the importance of recognizing that mathematico-formal deduction which yields new knowledge in *Realizing Reason*, 2014, as well as in earlier work.

[415] Cf. *supra.*, Chapter 6.

relation. Notably, the distinction between non-completable and completed is itself a qualitative distinction[416].

The second point to which we would like to bring attention finds Hegel approvingly citing a geometrical example given by Spinoza (indeed, he does not disagree with *everything* said by the latter).[417] It is a question once again of affirming (against Kant) that a true mathematical infinity must be something that is *completed*, rather than 'an incomplete multitude or series'[418]. The example is of two non-concentric circles, one inside the other. The straight sides of the segments of the space between the two circles differ in length among themselves (the magnitudes of the sides of the segments are unequal). There are an infinite number of segments and an infinite number of inequalities. They are incommensurable with any discrete countable quantum (any *amount*). But this incommensurability is itself grounded in a 'qualitative connection' (presumably that of the inter-relating or inter-reflecting qua 'moments' of a specific countable and a specific uncountable)[419], and Hegel reaffirms Spinoza's view that 'here, in the space of the example, the infinite is not somewhere beyond, but is present and complete'[420]:

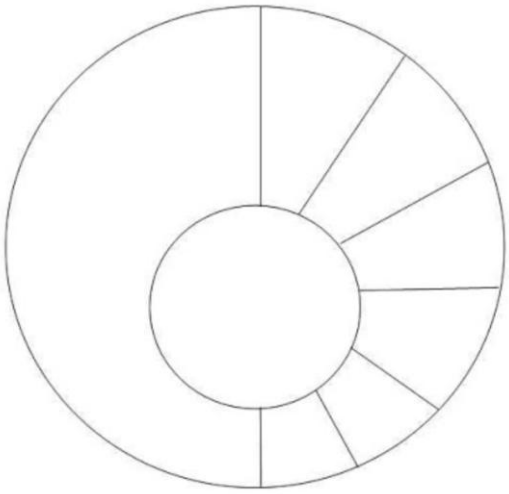
[416] Hegel, *Logic*, 208-212.

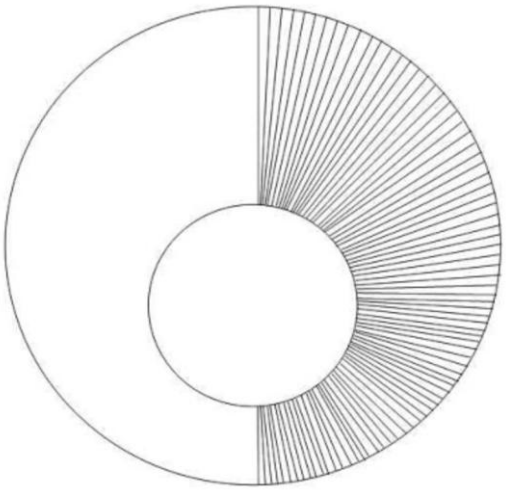
[417] *Ibid.*, 212-214.

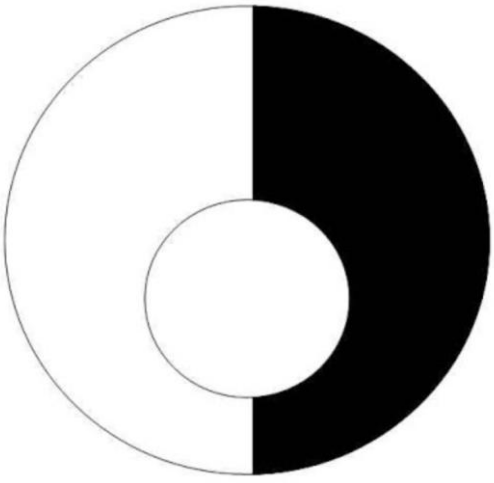
[418] *Ibid.*, 213.

[419] *Ibid.*

[420] *Ibid.* The following illustrations are taken from Corry Shores, 'Gueroult's "Spinoza's Letter on the Infinite (Letter XII, to Louis Meyer)", summarized', http://piratesandrevolutionaries.blogspot.com/2008/12/gueroults-spinozas-letter-on-infinite.html, which provides a helpful commentary on Spinoza's letter.







Conclusion

1. *Is the Law fraught with ought?*

What we have just argued with respect to mathematics, and higher up with respect to other modalities of knowledge, amounts to saying, speaking in Hegelese, that knowing noumena cannot happen merely through following entirely arbitrary rules which – qua relativizable to their own arbitrariness – would never allow any conceptual necessity to be retroactively constructed. We do not merely have the *ought*; we also have the Law of the thing, the Law of the determinacy in question: the Law of form. The Law is the intelligibility of the qualitatively differentiable invariancies of the thing. It is for Hegel *inherent* to the thing, insofar as the thing is essence which appears – keeping in mind that appearance is *Shein*, the coincidence of being and non-being, and hence that essence is rent by negativity. That essence be rent by negativity does not rule out that it is *effective*: consequentially operative. This is what we see in the following passage, which is about the concept of mechanism in nature. According to Hegel mechanism qua 'for-itself' is truly effective: when we learn about mechanisms we 'pierce the noumenon'. And yet, in the same breath it is affirmed that, still, there is *no transparency of the thing to knowing*. Rather, we have to experimentally make the Law articulate itself by forcing it to appear in and through the mediation of the concept. We exacerbate, prod, and poke ideality in order to construct an idea of what that-which-is-not-ideality (mechanism) is *in it* – in ideality – rather than passively accepting any deceitfully marauding simple exteriorities:

> This self-determining unity that absolutely reduces external objectivity to ideality is a principle of *self-movement*; the *determinateness* of this animating principle, which is the difference of the concept itself, is the *law*. – Dead mechanism was the mechanical process of objects above considered that immediately appeared as self-subsisting, but precisely for that reason are in truth non-self-subsistent and have their center outside them; the process that passes over into *rest* exhibits either *contingency* and indeterminate difference or *formal uniformity*. This uniformity is indeed a *rule*, but not *law*. Only free mechanism has a *law*, the determination proper to pure individuality or to *the concept existing for itself*. As difference, the law is in itself the inexhaustible source of a self-igniting fire and, since in the ideality of its difference it refers only to itself, it is *free necessity*.[421]

[421] Hegel, *Logic*, 643-644.

Hegel is opposed to Kant's continued philosophical hardening (notwithstanding the legislation of it *to the object* exclusively *by* transcendental spontaneity) of a Newtonian notion of causality, ironclad inertia-impact conception of physical-natural powers bumping into each other pin-ball style, and (arguably) correspondingly inevitable reification of chains of cause and effect even in his antinomical '*what if*' musings on the noumenon. Rather, Hegel believes that it is *only* in a self-differentiating ideality that any sense at all can be made of mechanism. And this has to be an *absolute* ideality, wherein forms topple into contents then keel back over into forms again, without needing for propulsion to introject a starved moral law from the meta-shape of bourgeoisdom's social asphyxiation. What this entails is that the *act* of this self-relating ideality cannot possibly be *passive* in the face of what would pretend to be an 'iron-clad' causal determinism. In Hegel the actuality of the cause cannot trump the actuality of the concept, not because the concept legislates it to the object, but because the viability of a type of objet-actuality off which the concept would toothlessly richochet (ie., the non-contradictory Kantian self-identical substance) – condemning the concept to suck the flavourless chewing gum of the '*as if*' – has gone up in a puff of smoke with the torched oppositive exclusion of substance 'over there' and subject 'over here'. This means, indeed, that for the Hegelian it is going to be meaningless to maintain that the causal powers of natural things could be said to be subservient to a nomological regime bizarrely exclusionally separated from those natural things themselves, looming in an abstract dominion. If the concept of change is the concept of a self-contradicting, then the prospect of lawlikeness as a non-actual nomological '*what if*' bouncing off Newtonian-Democritean self-sufficient physical stuffs is a non-contradiction too far.

And yet, the reading of Hegel here presented has been that he cannot, by his own lights, be saying (or could not by his own lights get away with saying) that the inherent and the interior *unveil themselves* diaphanously to knowing. On the contrary, by applying Sellars' critical edge we have read Hegel as saying that Spirit has to knock its head against and fight the phenomenon – which amounts, along one metaphorical axis and with rhetorical nuances and caveats required, to Spirit *torturing itself* (for Spirit produces the phenomenon behind its own back) – in order to make these Laws appear by negatingly building them. On our reading, in Hegel, the interiority of the thing cannot ever thaw the inferential and constructivist negativity, the exteriority of erroneous wrongness – of immediacy-to-be-mediated – because interiority is produced through and in this very exteriority.

That Spirit can only ever be subjugated to estranged instances of its own activity, but that it does in fact stumble and ensnare itself in subservience to, and constriction by, the value-form, while the non-*geistig* Marxian acephalic act which is the inverse and condition of its self-consciousness becomes caught in contradictions which can only, if at all, be superseded in *practice*, as opposed to in theory, means that the exteriority (or 'in-between-ness') which is the medium of Spirit's possible production of the interiorities of things – their Laws – must be itself,

in-itself, a type of activity such as to be prone to crash out and fail entirely. That which comes opaquely to know self-igniting fires by making them ignite themselves cannot itself be a self-igniting fire. As we saw Hegel stating above, '[m]easure is indeed an external way of things' – so, as we asked, can any necessity at all be made to appear without the external icepick of the *ought*, of a norm? And yet, at the same time, this external errancy must not itself be stipulated as being crypto-metaphysically external to its own externality as an unconstituted constitutor *à la* Kant and Fichte. Effectivity *and actuality* must be attributed to the norm – to the *ought* – and it seems to us that this Hegelian realization opens up the Sellarso-Nietzschean can of worms of what we have called the regime of torture whereby animals become capable of making promises.

However, it seems important at this point not to give up on the Absolute and the moment of absolutization. Indeed, as a matter of fact, to conceive the Law as we have tried to conceive it – as fraught with ought – would arguably be, in Hegel's eyes, to articulate its Idea: a concrete universal.

> That which endures is regarded more highly than that which soon passes, but all blossom, all that is exquisite in living being, dies early. The most perfect also endures however, not only in the lifeless inorganic universal, but also in the other inherently concrete universal of the genus, the law, the idea, and the spirit. We have to decide whether something is the whole process, or merely one moment of it. As law, the universal is also inherently a process, and lives only as process; but it is not part of the process, it is not within the process, it contains its double aspect, and is itself without process. In its phenomenal aspect, law falls within time because the moments of the Notion show themselves as independent; but in their Notion the excluded differences reconcile and relate themselves, and are harmoniously reassimilated.[422]

It may well be that, as law, the universal is also inherently a process, and a bloodstained one at that. But Hegel's neglect to theorize the disjunction between theory and practice (their identity thus far in history, and perhaps forever, *only* of-the-last-instance) cannot excuse practicalizing what is non-practical in the intelligible. This issue turns around time and the atemporal and, if the premises proposed in this investigation be accepted, would appear to enjoin affirming with Hegel that the Absolute – a product not a given – is *eternal*. The Law may be from one vantage fraught with ought *such as to* summon up the image of concept-mongers flailing

[422] Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature Volume I*, ed. and trans. M. J. Petry, London: Allen and Unwin, 1970, §258, *Addition*, 232.

around and grasping at straws, but from another the fraughtness of the *ought* in its complicity with the strangely exterior *measure* that is the very element of self-relatingly negative interiorization is such as to allow the sublation of old clichés, to the extent that it articulates new logical irreversibilities in the Absolute Idea. What would then be in need of being deterritorialized would be this moment of absolutization.

Concomitantly, one quibble which might be posed to Sellars springs up when we consider Bachelard's above-trailered mathematical aphorism: 'the infinitely small is a noumenon [*l'infiniment petit est un noumène*]'[423]. The phenomenon-appearance-error vs noumenon-reality-Truth distinction should not be drawn *exclusively* between the manifest and scientific images. Rather, the distinction must be drawn upon every (iterated equally on each) level of the manifest image, just as much as upon every level of the scientific image. If we are dealing with an excess of form over itself – an estranged excess of spirit or *Gattungswesen* over its own transparency-to-self – then 'causal' relation (unfree determination) will be found on the level of reason's own underside just as much as in nature. But you can learn how to 'traverse your phantasy' (Lacan) in a sense arguably not a million miles away from that in which Cantor learnt for the first time about the infinitely small in the number line, as Bachelard's surprisingly Hegelian slogan sloganizes.

2. *The Problem of Novelty*

Our proposal in conclusion is that the New is not a quantitative burgeoning of some parameter – ten more kilos of the New please! – and nor is progress, qua negating surpassing, a quantitative amount – more and more boxes of progress stacking up in the warehouse, how great! On the contrary, to affirm the imperative of newness and surpassing can only be to affirm a *qualitative torsion* – a shift in the quality of practice (freely self-determining vs dependent); but practice is opaque to itself… – *or* in the articulation of the Absolute Idea, which is structured around qualitative logically irreversible differences of the shape of unities-in-contradiction of opposites. The criticism of 'whiggishness' should be parried because, among other reasons, here going forwards coincides with going backwards.

> Indeed, as portrayed by it [the science of logic], progression in philosophy would be rather a retrogression and a grounding, only by virtue of which it then follows as result that that, with which the beginning was made, was not just an arbitrary assumption but was in fact *the truth*, and *the first truth* at that.

[423] Bachelard, *The Philosophy of No*, 94. Translation modified.

> Essential to science is not so much that a pure immediacy should be the beginning, but that the whole of science is in itself a circle in which the first becomes also the last, and the last also the first.
>
> Conversely, it follows that it is just as necessary to consider as *result* that into which the movement returns as to its *ground*. In this respect, the first is just as much the ground, and the last a derivative; since the movement makes its start from the first and by correct inferences arrives at the last as the ground, this last is result.[424]

Thus Adorno at the close of *Negative Dialectics* speaks of 'decay' and 'transience' as clues, or rather goals, for non-auto-choking negation, *even* in capitalist society.[425] Perhaps the aim must be the weaponization of the passivity imposed upon us by successional temporality in order to turn it back against itself so as to become *active*. Notably, the Hegelian absolute, in at least one of its aspects, is non-temporal, and hence non-successional. It may provide leverage for this aim. Logical irreversibility can be said to reverse temporal irreversibility to the extent that it cannot be reversed by it. Determinate negation – the fruit of, and leverage for, becoming active *through* the raw material of the successional helplessness imposed upon us by *what happens* – is like a nuclear isotope which only decays if we make it decay.

Certain modalities of successional temporality are produced contingently upon calculation and relations of dependence predicated upon the need – or the *natural impulse* – to survive. Does this mean that to abolish capitalism and effectuate communism, removing scarcity and the need to calculate for survival, would abolish all successional temporality in self-consciousness?

If determinate negation is to be salvaged from the recent onslaught of rejections of it, then this could only be done by putting incompleteness in the right place, lest it entrain a bad infinity. The Hegelian Absolute is complete and completable. On the other hand, if the gap between *ought* and *is* were closed such as to *destroy successional temporality*, could there then be any sense in worrying about freedom? Wouldn't newness and oldness both simply disappear? The imperative to surpass seems rather to only make sense in the scenario where one can aim to make the temporal splinter into the atemporal. If transient decay is a good trope for successful negation, does this make sense in absence of something atemporal?

---

[424] Hegel, *Logic*, 48, 49.

[425] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. Dennis Redmond. 2001 [1966], 353.

It is easy to see that music may be said to *organize forms of transient disappearing*, but a rather more knotty question to ask how it is that its disappearances don't simply disappear themselves and to ask after the forms of its organization. Our hunch is that in this question the negativity of the *ought-is* gap may here be related to a self-obscurity-in-act: the claim would be that humans *simply are* animals clambering over unclear and indistinct obstacles, such that the contradictory threshold between noise-in-act and clarification-in-act is music's bread and butter. And in Sellars there is ample food for thought regarding a possible unity-in-contradiction of the disappearingness of the act and the *ought*-fraught determinacy which it determines.

However, to suggest, as we have with respect to the natural sciences, that the goal of the sublation or surpassing of contradictions is more new contradictions is ultimately not sufficient, because it threatens to relapse into the bad infinity which has been argued to be the key enemy to a conception of surpassing that would twist free of quantitative optimization. More and more contradictions indifferently is not really something to look forward to. This is a scenario recalling *Antigone* as read by Lacan around 1960: the deathless atemporal indifference at the heart of the Law itself means that the only way Antigone can make play the 'inverse' of the Law is by saying a steely 'No!' to and *destroying* everything, including herself. However, to read Hegel with Sellars and with other of the materialists who have looked askance at him without swatting him away is, arguably, to desubstantialize the Law by means of the *ought*. It seems that Hegel's idea is that the bad infinity is only avoided when something *contradicts contradiction*, achieving a phase-shift between badness and goodness. The contradictory threshold which is the bread and butter of the modern natural sciences is that between cause (external heteronomy, *die Ohnmact der Natur*: the impuissance of nature) and spontaneity (autonomy, self-reflection). The question which has to be asked then is: What contradicts this contradiction?

How would one move forward with formulating this puzzle? If it is accepted that spontaneity is conceived through its being what might be called an 'unproduced use-value' – because it is hard to disassociate spontaneity from an idea of the good – then equally the good *qua use* is tied up with the idea of means and ends, and, further, concretizes itself through its distinction from uselessness. But the distinction use-uselessness is knotted to the distinction between heteronomy and autonomy in such a way that one has to say something historically specific about the relevant heteronomies that are in force – but without reifying them, because knowledge is a product of spirit, or of our own social practice. This means that the cause-spontaneity contradiction is a contradiction in knowing itself, but also that knowing is constricted by the real abstraction that is the value-form; and *use* is circumscribed by this form also. Therefore, in order to contradict the cause-spontaneity contradiction, one might well look to *uselessness* as the promising criterion. Is uselessness indifferent to the autonomy-heteronomy distinction, even if it arises from it? But then, problems will crop up regarding how to effectuate uselessness: if it is merely an indeterminate negation of use then this is too vague and 'weak' and

risks being recuperated by neoliberalism's box-ticking regime in the optimizable box of abstract production.

Does this mean that uselessness must be wedded to determinate negation? To pursue this avenue would be to posit a distinction within actuality such that the self-relatingness of self-relating negativity be somehow detachable from compulsive legality *without coming completely adrift from material social relations and practices*. At the same time, what makes this line of investigation worth pursuing is that, if internalization is a species of exteriority – rather than excluding it – then the difficultly of working out what to do is the inverse of saying 'No!' to simply-external instructions. Our argument is that it is hard to see how the problematic of self-relating negativity could easily be dropped if what is of interest is what happens when 'No!' is said to the 'No!'.

Bibliography

Adorno, T. W. 'On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening.' In eds. Andrew Arato & Eike Gebhardt. *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. NY: Continuum, 1985 [1938]. 270-299.

Adorno, T. W. *Aesthetic Theory*. Ed. & trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. London/NY: Continuum, 1997 [1970].

Adorno, T. W. 'Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait.' In *Quai una fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. London/NY: Verso, 1998 [1963].

Adorno, T. W. *Negative Dialectics*. Trans. Dennis Redmond. 2001 [1966]. http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ndtrans.html. 21.

Adorno, T. W. *Negative Dialectics*. Trans. E. B. Ashton. NY: Continuum, 2007 [1966].

Adorno, T. W. 'Alban Berg.' In *Figures sonores. Écrits musicaux I*. Trans. Marianne Rocher-Jacquin & Claude Maillard. Geneva: Contrechamps, 2006 [1978/chapter 1956]. 69-78.

Adorno, T. W. *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique. Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies*. Trans. Willis Domingo. Cambridge/Malden: Polity, 2013.

Ali, N. B. Symposium presentation. *Communism will be the collective management of alienation*. Fridericianum Kassel. 5 September 2017.

al Qadiri, F. EP. *Desert Strike*. Fade to Mind. 2012.

Aristotle. *Categories and De Interpretatione*. Trans. J. L. Ackrill. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963.

Assoun, P.-L. *Marx et la répétition historique*, Paris: PUF, 1978.

Bachelard, G. *The Philosophy of No*. Trans. G. C. Waterston. NY: Orion Press, 1968 [1940].

Bachelard, G. 'The Dialectics of Outside and Inside.' Excerpted from *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. In ed. Clive Cazeaux. *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*. London/NY: Routledge, 2000. 151-163.

Badiou, A. *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*. Trans. Louise Burchill. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000 [1997].

Badiou, A. *Being and Event*. Trans. Oliver Feltham. London/NY: Continuum, 2006 [1988].

Badiou, A. *The Concept of Model: An Introduction to the Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics*. Ed. & trans. Zachary Luke Fraser and Tzuchien Tho. Melbourne: re.press, 2007 [1969].

Badiou, A. *Theory of the Subject*. Trans. Bruno Bosteels. London/NY: Continuum, 2009 [1982].

Badiou, A. *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event, 2*. Trans. Alberto Toscano, London/NY: Bloomsbury, 2009.

Badiou, A., Bellassen, J., and Mossot, L. *The Rational Kernel of the Hegelian Dialectic*, ed. and trans. Tzuchien Tho, Melbourne: re.press, 2011 [1978].

Badiou, A. 'Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art.' In eds. Bassam El Baroni & Mahmoud Khaled. *Fifteen Ways to Leave Badiou*. Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum, 2011.

Badiou, A. *L'Immanence des vérités. L'Être et l'Événement, 3*. Paris: Fayard, 2018.

Barriger, R. V. 'Sellars and Quine on Abstracta in Scientific Ontology.' *Res Cogitans* 7:1, 2016. 46-51.

Bataille, G. 'Letter to X, Lecturer on Hegel.' In eds. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson. *The Bataille Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997. 296-300.

Beech, A. 'Sanity Assain.' Video work. 2010. http://amandabeech.com/works/sanity-assassin/.

Bergson, Henri. *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Trans. Mabelle L. Andison. NY: Citadel, 1992.

Brandom, R. B. *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Brandom, R. *Between Saying and Doing*. Oxford: OUP, 2008.

Brassier, R. *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*. Basingstoke/NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Brassier, R., Guionnet, J.-L., Mattin & Maurayama, S. 'Idioms and Idiots.' 2010. https://www.jeanlucguionnet.eu/IMG/pdf/IDIOMS_AND_IDIOTS.pdf.

Brassier, R. 'Nominalism, Naturalism, and Materialism: Sellars's Critical Ontology.' In eds. Bana Bashour & Hans D. Muller, *Contemporary Philosophical Naturalism and Its Implications*, NY/London: Routledge, 2014.

Brassier, R. 'The Metaphysics of Sensation: Psychological Nominalism and the Reality of Consciousness.' In ed. Patrick J. Reider. *Wilfrid Sellars, Idealism, and Realism: Understanding Psychological Nominalism*. London/NY: Bloomsbury, 2017.

Brassier, R. 'Strange Sameness.' *Angelaki* 24:1. 2019. 98-105.

Cavaillès, J. *Sur la logique et la théorie de la science*. Eds. Canguilhem & Ehresmann. Paris: Vrin, 2008.

Cavaillès, J. and Lautman, A. 'Mathematical Thought.' Trans. Robin Mackay. [1939]. https://www.urbanomic.com/document/mathematical-thought/.

Caygill, H. *A Kant Dictionary*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Châtelet, F. *Platon*. Gallimard, 1965.

Châtelet, G. *Figuring Space: Philosophy, Mathematics, and Physics*. Trans. Robert Shore and Murial Zagha. Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer, 2000 [1993].

Châtelet, G. 'Interlacing the Singularity, the diagram and the metaphor.' Ed. Charles Alunni. Trans. Simon Duffy. In Simon Duffy ed. Châtelet, G. *Virtual Mathematics: the Logic of Difference*. Manchester: Clinamen, 2006. 31-45.

Chiesa, L. *The Not-Two: Logic and God in Lacan*. Cambridge/London: MIT, 2016.

Christias, D. 'Does Brandom's "Kant-Sellars Thesis about Modality" Undermine Sellars' Scientific Naturalism?' In eds. Pereplyotchik & Barnbaum. *Sellars and Contemporary Philosophy*. NY & London: Routledge, 2017. 183-186.

Christias, D. 'Thinking with Sellars and Beyond Sellars on the Relations Between Philosophy and the History of Philosophy.' In eds. Luca Corti & Antonio Nunziate. *Sellars and the History of Philosophy*. NY: Routledge, 2018. 257-276. Accessible online at https://www.academia.edu/35388177/Thinking_With_Sellars_and_Beyond_Sellars_on_the_Relations_Between_Philosophy_and_the_History_of_Philosophy.

Coleman, L. (Big L.) Song lyric 'Put It On.' Album *Lifestylez ov da Poor & Dangerous*. Columbia-Sony, 1994.

Comay, R. 'Hypochondria and Its Discontents, or, the Geriatric Sublime.' *Crisis and Critique*. Vol. 3 (2), Autumn 2016. 40-58.

Comay, R. and Ruda, F. *The Dash: the Other Side of Absolute Knowing*, Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 2018.

Davidson, D. *Enquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 2001. 183-198.

Deleuze, G. 'Review of Jean Hyppolite's *Logique et existence*.' *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*. 144 : 457 (1954). http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpdeleuze6.htm.

Deleuze, G. *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. Mark Lester. London: Athlone, 1990.

Deleuze, G. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. London/NY: Continuum, 2004.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London/NY: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Dolar, M. 'Of Drives and Culture.' *Problemi International* vol. 1 no. 1. 2017. 55-79.

Duhem, P. *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*. Trans. Philip P. Wiener. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1982 [1906].

Endnotes. *Endnotes 2. Misery and the Value-Form*. April 2010.

Fox, D. 'Structure and System in Badiou and Laruelle.' 2015. https://medium.com/@poetix/structure-and-system-in-badiou-and-laruelle-1fb5c891a13c.

Fox, D. 'Under Pressure: Marx, Metaphysics and the Cunning of Abstraction. (Response to Katerina Kolozova).' Symposium contribution, 2017. https://syndicate.network/symposia/philosophy/toward-a-radical-metaphysics-of-socialism/.

Franks, P. W. *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism*. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Gangle, R. *François Laruelle's Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction and Guide*. Edinburgh: EUP, 2013.

Girard, J.-Y. *La Fantôme de la transparence*. Paris: Allia, 2016.

Goris, W. and Aertsen, J. 'Mediaval Theories of Transcendentals.' In ed. Edward N. Zalta. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Fall 2019 Edition. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendentals-medieval/index.html.

Hare, M. and Woodard, B. 'Anti-Eureka.' *Glassbead*. 2017. http://www.glass-bead.org/article/anti-eureka/?lang=enview.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Philosophy of Nature*. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: OUP, 1970 [1847].

Hegel, G. W. F. *Philosophy of Nature Volume I*. Ed. and trans. M. J. Petry. London: Allen and Unwin, 1970.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Philosophy of Subjective Sprit: Volume 3*. Ed. & trans. M. J. Petry. Dordrecht: Reidel. 1978.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Volume 3. Trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 1995.

Hegel, G. W. F. *The Science of Logic*, trans. & ed. George di Giovanni, Cambridge: CUP, 2010 [1812-1832].

Hegel, G. W. F. *Science de la logique. Livre premier – L'être. Textes de 1812 et 1832*. Trans. Bernard Bourgeois. Paris: Vrin, 2015.

Hegel, G. W. F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. & ed. Terry Pinkard. Cambridge: CUP, 2018 [1807].

Hegel, G. W. F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: OUP, 1977 [1807].

Heidegger, M. *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Trans. Richard Taft. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Hume, D. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Excerpted in ed. Isaiah Berlin. *The Age of Enlightenment*. NY: Mentor, 1956.

Hyppolite, J. *Logic and Existence*. Trans. Leonard Lawlor & Amit Sen. Albany: SUNY. 1997.

Kant, I. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. & ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: CUP, 1998 [1781/1783].

Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*. In Kant, *Practical Philosophy*. Ed. & trans. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: CUP, 1996 [1788].

Kant, I. *Correspondence*. Trans. and ed. Arnulf Zweig. Cambridge: CUP, 1999.

Kant, I. *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics*. Trans. & ed. Gary Hatfield. Cambridge: CUP, 2004 [1783].

Kant, I. *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics*. Trans. Paul Carus. Eternal Sun Books, 2017 [1783].

Kelly, R. *The Alternative: A Study in Psychology*. London: Macmillan and Co, 1882.

Khamis, D. 'Ontology and Process in Schelling and Sellars.' Unpublished conference paper. North American Schelling Society Meeting, 2015.

Koyré, A. 'Influence of Philosophic Trends on the Formulation of Scientific Theories.' *The Scientific Monthly* 80:2. 1955. 107-111.

Koyré, A. 'De l'influence des conceptions philosophiques sur l'évolution des théories scientifiques.' Publication details unavailable.

Kristeva, J. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. Margaret Waller. NY/Guildford: Columbia University Press. 1984.

Kuhn, T. S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Lacan, J. Seminar XI. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. London/NY: Karnac, 2004 [1964-1965].

Lacan, *The Sinthome 1975-1976. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XXIII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A. R. Price, Cambridge/Malden: Polity, 2016 [1975-1976].

Lakatos, I. 'Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes.' In eds. Lakatos & Musgrave. *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*. Cambridge: CUP, 1970.

Laruelle, F. *Une biographie de l'homme ordinaire. Des Autorités et des Minorités*. Paris: Aubier, 1985.

Laruelle, F. *Philosophie et non-philosophie*. Liège: Mardaga. 1989.

Laruelle, F. *En tant qu'un*. Paris: Aubier, 1991.

Laruelle, F. 'What can non-philosophy do?' Trans. Ray Brassier. *Angelaki* 8:2. 2003. 169-189.

Laruelle, F. *Introduction aux sciences génériques*. Paris: Pétra, 2008.

Laruelle, F. *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-philosophy*. Trans. Rocco Gangle. London/NY: Continuum. 2010 [1986].

Laruelle, F. *Philosophie non-standard. Générique, quantique, philo-fiction*. Paris : Kimé, 2010.

Laruelle, F. 'The Truth According to Hermes: Theorems on the Secret and Communication.' Trans. Alexander R. Galloway. *Parrhesia* 9. 2010. 18-22.

Laruelle, F. *The Concept of Non-Photography*. Trans. Robin Mackay, Falmouth/NY: Urbanomic/Sequence, 2011.

Laruelle, F. *Principles of Non-Philosophy*. Trans. Rubczak & Smith. London/NY: Bloomsbury, 2013 [1996].

Laruelle, F. *Christo-fiction: The Ruins of Athens and Jerusalem*. Trans. Robin Mackay, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015.

Laruelle, F. 'I am a collider of concepts, not a dialectician.' Interview with *Philosophie Magazine*. February 2015. Trans. Timothy Lavenz. 2017. https://fragilekeys.com/2017/12/10/laruelle-concept-collider/?fbclid=IwAR12BLuhUnULwlX094qLiLgndWx_KdJxUw1eJfAdKi0YK75J6aCKCxth23k.

Laruelle, F. *Theory of Identities*. Trans. Alyosha Edlebi. NY: Columbia, 2016.

Lautman, A. *Essay on the Notions of Structure and Existence in Mathematics*. In Lautman, A. *Mathematics, Ideas and the Physical Real*. Trans. Simon B. Duffy. London/NY: Continuum, 2011 [1938]. 87- 193.

Lebrun, G. *La Patience du concept. Essai sur le discours hégélien*. Paris: Gallimard, 1972.

Longo, G. 'The Consequences of Philosophy.' *Glassbead* Site 0, 'Castalia, the Game of Ends and Means.' 2016. http://www.glass-bead.org/article/the-consequences-of-philosophy/?lang=enview.

Longuenesse, B. *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Macbeth, D. *Realizing Reason: A Narrative of Truth and Knowing*. Oxford: OUP, 2014.

Malaspina, C. *An Epistemology of Noise*. London: Bloomsbury. 2018.

Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The German Ideology*. Excerpted in ed. David McLellan. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Oxford: OUP, 2000. 175-208.

Marx, K. *Grundrisse*. Excerpted in ed. David McLellan. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Oxford: OUP, 2000. 379-423.

Marx, K. *Capital*. Excerpted in ed. David McLellan. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Oxford: OUP, 2000. 452-546.

McDowell, J. *Mind and World*. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1996.

McTaggart, J. E. 'The Unreality of Time.' *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* 17, 1908, 456-473. Available online at http://www.ditext.com/mctaggart/time.html.

Quentin Meillassoux. 'The Immanence of the World Beyond.' In eds. Candler & Cunningham. *The Grandeur of Reason*. London: SCM, 2010. 444-478.

Mertens, W. *American Minimal Music*. Trans. J. Hautekiet. London: Kahn & Averill, 1983.

Metzinger, T. *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 2003.

Millikan, R. 'The Father, The Son and the Daughter: Sellars, Brandom and Milikan.' 2005. https://philosophy.uconn.edu/faculty/millikan/#.

Negarestani, R. Video recording of seminar presentation. Lecture course for the New Centre for Research & Practice. 'Kant's Circle of Revenge: A close encounter with the *Critique of Pure Reason*.' 12th November 2017.

Negarestani, R. *Intelligence and Spirit*. Falmouth/NY: Urbanomic/Sequence, 2018.

Nietzsche, F. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson. Trans. Carol Diethe. Cambridge: CUP, 2006.

Pinkard, T. 'Sellars the Post-Kantian?' In ed. Wolf & Lance. *The Self-Correcting Enterprise: Essays on Wilfrid Sellars*. Amsterdam/NY: Rodopi, 2006. 21-52.

Plato, *Republic*. Trans. G. M. A. Grube & C. D. C. Reeve. In ed. John M. Cooper. *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1997. 971-1223.

Quine, W. V. O. 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism.' In Quine. *From a Logical Point of View: Logico-Philosophical Essays*. NY: Harper & Row, 1963. 20-46.

Quine, W. V. O. 'On What There Is.' In Quine. *From a Logical Point of View*. 1-19.

Quine, W. V. O. 'Identity, Ostention, and Hypostasis.' In *From a Logical Point of View*. 65-79.

Schelling, F. W. J. *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* (1801, 1859). In ed. Manfred Schröter. *Schellings Werke*. München, 1927, Vol. 3.

Schiller, F. 'Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner.' (1793). In ed. J. M. Bernstein. *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics*. Cambridge: CUP, 2003. 145-183.

Schopenhauer, A. *The World as Will and Idea, Vol. III*. Trans. R. B. Haldane & J. Kemp. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1909. Project Gutenburg EBook, 2012.

Seibt, J. *Properties as Process: A Synoptic Study of Wilfrid Sellars' Nominalism*. Austin: Ridgeview Digital, 1990.

Sellars, W. 'Inference and Meaning.' *Mind* Vol. 62 No. 247, 1953, 313-338.

Sellars, W. 'Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities.' In eds. Herbert Feigl, Michael Scriven & Grover Maxwell. *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Volume II*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958. 225-308.

Sellars, W. 'Abstract Entities.' *Review of Metaphysics* 16:4. 1963. 627-671.

Sellars, W. 'Language as Thought and as Communication.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 29 (4), 1969. 506-527.

Sellars, W. 'The Structure of Knowledge.' In ed. Hector-Neri Castañeda. *Action, Knowledge and Reality: Studies in Honor of Wilfrid Sellars*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merril, 1975. 295-347.

Sellars, W. 'Vlastos and "The Third Man".' In Sellars, W. *Philosophical Perspectives: History of Philosophy*. Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1977.

Sellars, W. 'Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process. The Carus Lectures of Wilfrid Sellars.' *The Monist* 64 (1) 1981: 3-90. Available online at: http://www.ditext.com/sellars/carus200.html.

Sellars, W. *Science, Perception, and Reality*, Atascadero: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1991 [1963].

Sellars, W. 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind.' In Sellars. *Science, Perception and Reality*. 1991. 129-194.

Sellars, W. 'Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man.' In Sellars. *Science, Perception and Reality*. 1991. 7-43.

Sellars, W. 'Truth and Correspondence.' In Sellars. *Science, Perception and Reality*. 1991. 195-222.

Sellars, W. 'Naming and Saying.' In Sellars. *Science, Perception and Reality*. 1991. 223-245.

Sellars, W. 'Phenomenalism.' In Sellars, *Science, Perception, and Reality*. 1991. 63-107.

Sellars, W. *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes*. Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1992 [1967].

Sellars, W. *Naturalism and Ontology: The John Dewey Lectures for 1974*. Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1996 [1979].

Sellars, W. 'The Role of Imagination in Kant's Theory of Experience.' In eds. Kevin Scharp & Robert Brandom. *In the Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2007. 454-466.

Sellars, W. 'The Soul as Craftsman.' In Sellars, W. *Philosophical Perspectives. History of Philosophy*. Atascadero: Ridgeview, 2011 [1959], 7-17.

Shores, C. 'Gueroult's "Spinoza's Letter on the Infinite (Letter XII, to Louis Meyer)", summarized.' 2008. http://piratesandrevolutionaries.blogspot.com/2008/12/gueroults-spinozas-letter-on-infinite.html.

Skempton, S. *Alienation after Derrida*, London/NY: 2010.

Spinoza, B. *Ethics*. Trans. Edwin Curley. London: Penguin, 1996.

Tinland, O. *L'idéalisme hégélien*. Paris: CNRS, 2013.

Tomšič, S. *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan*. London/NY: Verso, 2015.

Vuilleman, J. *L'héritage kantien et la révolution copernicienne. Fichte – Cohen – Heidegger*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954.

Wilkins, I. *Irreversible Noise: The Rationalisation of Randomness and the Fetishisation of Indeterminacy*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Goldsmiths University of London, 2015; forthcoming as a monograph, Falmouth: Urbanomic.

Windelband, W. *A History of Philosophy – Volume I: Greek, Roman, Medieval*. Trans. James H.

Tufts. NY: Harper & Row, 1958.

Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. Pears & McGuinness. London/NY: Routledge, 2001 [1921].

Žižek, S. *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and out*. New York: Routledge, 1992.