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BAD HABIT AND BAD FAITH. THE AMBIGUITY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS IN THE EARLY MERLEAU-PONTY*

JAN PUC**

ABSTRACT. Psychoanalysis had a profound influence on formation of Merleau-Ponty's thought. However, at the same time, he rejects Freud's idea that the unconscious consists of latent mental contents that cause a certain type of behavior. Instead of a hidden experience, Merleau-Ponty argues that the unconscious is an ambiguous consciousness. In *The Structure of Behavior* and *The Phenomenology of Perception*, he specifies this ambiguity by means of the concepts of habit, bad faith, bodily expression, affective intentionality and body schema. In this paper, I will present the interconnection of these aspects of the human existence, following Merleau-Ponty's two early major works. Further, I will show the difference of Merleau-Ponty's notion of bad faith from that of Sartre, and, finally, I will suggest a limitation of Merleau-Ponty's approach to the unconscious.

Keywords: *The Unconscious, Phenomenology, Habit, Bad Faith, Corporeity*

As long as phenomenology is not to refuse the notion of the unconscious wholesale, it must show that and how the unconscious appears. In S. Freud's work, three notions of the unconscious can be distinguished. The broad notion involves all the mental life that we do not realize now. The unconscious in the narrow sense encompasses the mental contents that have been repressed. The drive, which is represented by these contents, has met the resistance by which they are denied to consciousness. This concept of the unconscious as repression was considered by Freud (1971: 146) as the crucial discovery of psychoanalysis. However, the unconscious might still be seen in a third sense. Although the repressed content does not arrive

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to consciousness directly, nevertheless it manifests itself in symptoms, imaginations, affections and dreams. The repression thus goes hand in hand with the return of the repressed, from which the existence of repression can be deduced. Between the repression and the return of the repressed content, a “primary process” has taken place, whose two main forms are condensation and displacement. This unconscious work is the third meaning of the unconscious.

Already this brief recapitulation of Freud shows that the unconscious even in the meaning of repression has a specific manifestation. It is thus open to a phenomenological interpretation: one can ask about the way in which the unconscious appears. Between the *Structure of Behavior* and lectures from the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, M. Merleau-Ponty’s thought have undergone a profound change that is also reflected in his interpretation of the concept of the unconscious. Nonetheless, we can identify some constant features that Merleau-Ponty’s approach to the unconscious retained throughout this development. The first is rejection of the idea that the unconscious consists of latent mental contents that cause a certain type of behavior. The second is the interpretation of the unconscious as an ambivalent behavior, which includes a partially conscious attitude towards the repressed. In this paper, I will present Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of the unconscious as an ambivalent consciousness, following his two early major works.

1. The disintegrated behavior

In the *Structure of Behavior*, the exposition of the unconscious is used to illustrate the way in which human behavior relates to its vital foundation. According to Merleau-Ponty, the relationship of behavior dominated by the sexual drive to normal behavior is that of the partial to the total. Normal behavior is a higher structure that integrates lower structures without remainder. Therefore, man has no autonomous drives which would manifest themselves in mental life and which the mind or ego would have to surmount. “Reorganized in its turn in new wholes, vital behavior as such disappears.”(SB: 181)¹ The unconscious, as described by Freud, will only appear when this integration fails. Even then, there is a distinction between the unconscious as a structure of behavior and the unconscious as mental contents revealed in the mind by psychoanalysis. For example, a complex, i.e. a stereotyped response

¹ In this and other points, Merleau-Ponty largely adopts K. Goldstein’s interpretation of the unconscious. (Cf. Goldstein 1995: 240ff.)

to environmental stimuli we cannot come to terms with, is a structure of behavior. However, the memories and traumas that emerge during the analysis are a means of understanding this structure of behavior for the analyst. The same relationship subsists, according to Merleau-Ponty, between manifest and latent dream contents.²

For Merleau-Ponty, the unconscious represents a pathological or infantile pattern of behavior. What Freud called “repression”, “complex”, “regression” or “resistance” are partial, disintegrated ways of conduct that take us away from adequate understanding of situation and our attitudes. A dreamer behaves like a child who reacts immediately to a ban without asking for its meaning. A dream is a return to primitive behavior that is easier to adopt than integrated conduct. The complex encompasses also an effort to avoid confrontation with it, so that we do not need to integrate our behavior into a more meaningful whole and accept responsibility for it. Merleau-Ponty (SB: 179) summarizes: “the pretended unconsciousness of the complex is reduced to the ambivalence of immediate consciousness.” The complex subsists along with a partially conscious refusal to integrate it, and its unconsciousness is therefore “pretended”. At the same time, however, the complex is a regress to immediate reactions that *points* to an escape from a more complex behavior, and in this sense it is ambiguous.

Merleau-Ponty replaces the causal explanation of Freud with the structural difference between partial and complex behavior. The impression that there are autonomous latent mental contents that cause rigid behavioral patterns arises due to repetition of the behavior. However, according to Merleau-Ponty, there is no such cause that would force us to repeat; rather, the primitive behavior attracts us simply by being less demanding. The rigidity of “automatic” behavior represents a permanent threat to which human existence might succumb. The more human existence recedes from integration, the more the causal explanation appears plausible. To sum up, according to the author of the *Structure of Behavior*, the unconscious is an insufficiently integrated behavior. Without using that term in this connection, Merleau-Ponty effectively adopts Goldstein’s interpretation of the unconscious as a bad habit.³ This interpretation is based on a sharp distinction between the normal and the pathological, and the propensity of human existence to “unconscious behavioral structuration” explained by its inner weakness.

² That the latent content of dream is not a cause of the manifest content but a means of understanding it, is a main thesis of G. Politzer’s book, to which Merleau-Ponty refers repeatedly. (Cf. Politzer 1928: 163ff.)

³ Goldstein explicitly conceives of symptoms in terms of habits. (Cf. Goldstein 1995: 253f.)

2. Bad faith

Just as in the previous book, the *Phenomenology of Perception* offers an exposition of the unconscious within a discussion concerning man's relation to his vital basis, and the unconscious is approached mainly as a pathological deviation from a normal situation. Yet, it receives the status of a privileged example, which shows the human condition better than anything else.

Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 164f.) explains the nature of the unconscious with the example of a repressed memory. A man who, after having a fight with his wife, cannot remember where he placed a book she gave him before, did not lose this memory by accident, but because it belongs to the region of life he refuses. Repression of a particular experience thus involves an affective, volitional, and cognitive component: a certain region of life is *recognized*, which he *refuses*, and therefore he *resists* anything that might belong to this region. These acts are not explicitly aware emotions, choices, and knowledge. Similarly, their performance is not exhausted by removing one particular possibility from life. Refusing or accepting a certain area of life rather changes the field of possibilities of how to feel, what to decide and what can be recognized explicitly. Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 520, fn. 57) calls these implicit acts of the subject, through which we find our possibilities in the world, "existence".

Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 165) defines existence as an "adhesion" of life to the world, which is a condition of experiences with specific things. Its performance resembles the sensitivity of sensory organs for their particular areas. The unconscious, as the negative modality of existence, becomes a (temporary) loss of sense for a certain field. The repressed memory is literally lost, and even if the man wants to get it back, he does not know where to look. At the same time, by refusing it, he recognizes it and decides to repress it.⁴ The unconscious thus displays an ambiguity: the particular memory is both lost and retained.

Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 165) borrows from J.-P. Sartre's vocabulary and describes this ambiguity as "metaphysical hypocrisy" and "bad faith". However, there is a fundamental difference between Sartre's classical concept of bad faith from *Being and Nothingness* and its Merleau-Pontian adaptation in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, which reflects their different notions of existence.

Sartre defines bad faith as self-deception concerning the motivation of one's behavior, which arises from lying to oneself: "the one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person, which means that [...] I must

⁴ Importantly, Merleau-Ponty describes both psychological repression and some neurological disorders in the same way: "The patient knows his disability precisely insofar as he is ignorant of it, and he ignores it precisely insofar as he knows it." (PhP: 84.)

know the truth very exactly in order to conceal it more carefully and this [...] in the unitary structure of a single project.” (Sartre 1986: 49.) According to Sartre, bad faith is deliberate and conscious and it expresses aptly the situations described by the term “repression”. When the man from our example cannot find a certain memory, then, following Freud, it is the resistance of his inner censor that keeps it unconscious. Sartre argues that such an explanation just shifts the problem to another place without really resolving it. If the censor decides what to repress and what not, unconscious thoughts must be known to him. Therefore, Sartre (1986: 53) can describe the censor as “consciousness (of) being conscious of the drive to be repressed, but precisely *in order not to be conscious of it.*” Censorship itself is thus characterized by bad faith. Sartre concludes that, better than speaking of a mysterious censor who recognizes, approves, or rejects our thoughts that come from the unconscious, we should conceive of the situation as an ambiguous consciousness. The man does not know reflectively where the book from his wife is, but he is aware pre-reflectively of the repressed memory. The pre-reflective awareness of one’s own experiences is a condition of the reflective consciousness, and according to Sartre, the repressed experiences pose no exception.

Merleau-Ponty describes the unconscious in a similar vein, but in the end, he understands the ambiguity of bad faith differently from Sartre. The man who fell out with his wife both knows and does not know what he represses. Sartre would argue that this man knows about the repressed idea pre-reflectively and does not know about it reflectively. Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 165) emphasizes that the unconscious is connected with categorial knowledge of the repressed ideas: “Through this generality we still ‘have’ them, but just enough to hold them off at a distance from ourselves.” According to my interpretation, Merleau-Ponty suggests that this man does not discern one particular memory from another, but paradoxically without being aware of a particular experience, he recognizes that a recollection may belong to the region of life that he rejects. For this reason, a particular experience cannot form completely, and hence he cannot even know it. The angry man neither knows the specific ideas that he represses, nor may be able to explicitly recognize the region that he refuses to engage in. Yet he is able to discern that an *emerging* experience might belong to it. Accordingly, in the incipient stage, the experience is specific enough to be recognized as unwanted but not specific enough to possibly become an object of reflective consciousness. It is precisely this “blind” recognition of emerging experiences that distinguishes Merleau-Ponty’s concept of bad faith from that of Sartre.

A similar conceptual shift is also found in the volitional aspect of bad faith. Repression is not necessarily associated with an explicit refusal. It would be better to say that somewhere deep in us a decision was made to avoid some experiences at

all costs. The performance of these “existential decisions” does not lie on the shoulders of the individual, for they are mostly carried out through us or by means of us. Yet, we do not feel that they would be completely imposed on us or that they would happen automatically and without our complicity. Although we often cannot be held accountable for them, they are *our* personal, and frequently most important, attitudes and beliefs. Not only are conscious decisions and explicit knowledge conditioned by existential choice and “blind recognition”, moreover, our conscious life *assumes* this deeper setting of existence.⁵ Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, existence is neither short of self-awareness in the form of a general knowledge of one’s own emerging experiences, nor lacking in will in the form of involvement or indifference towards various regions of life. And while in Sartre bad faith is a sign of recession from the true nature of existence, in Merleau-Ponty’s conception, it shows the ambiguity that marks out the very essence thereof.

3. The body as expression

This ambiguity of existence is broadened by a bodily dimension. Between existence and body, Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 163) finds a relation of mutual expression, which he illustrates by the example of neurotic symptom. A young woman whose mother has forbidden her from seeing the young man she loves gradually loses her voice. The *aphonia*, as a way to withdraw from communication, expresses her refusal to coexist with other people. On this example, Merleau-Ponty builds his distinctive concept of bodily expression. The body does not designate existence as something external that could exist without this designation. The bodily expression is completely permeated by what it expresses, and the existence, as the signified, cannot exist without the body, as the signifier. Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 164) even more strongly asserts both that existential attitude forms the body as an appropriate way of expressing itself, and the expressive body itself becomes what is expressed. Thus, the bodily way of denoting is not a re-presentation of the meaning denoted, but its actual presence. Neither the body nor the existence is an original that would be unilaterally translated; rather, they express each other by becoming each other. In the words of Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 169): “the body is existence as congealed or generalized, and [...] existence is a perpetual embodiment.”

⁵ Because this “anonymous” level of existence is assumed by our personal life and “reintegrated into personal existence” (PhP: 87), it is rather “pre-personal” than impersonal. (PhP: 216)

One of consequences of this conception of expression is that, without the sign that expresses it, a particular existential attitude expressed could not exist, even in terms of its content. In other words, a different way of expression would also change the meaning expressed. In the case of the young woman who lost her voice, this means not only that *aphonia* expresses withdrawal from the shared world, but also, more strongly, that this rejection of the world is accomplished by its manifestation in the symptom. Therefore, in the case of this particular woman, the rejection of coexistence could not have been manifested in another form than that of *aphonia*, since another symptom, such as *alogia*, would have expressed a different attitude. *Aphonia* thus becomes part of what it itself expresses, and, to a certain extent, it expresses itself.

However, if the bodily symptom affects the kind of disorder, just as the disorder determines the kind of symptom, the body actively enters into how we are open to the world. Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 166) illustrates this with an example of a touch that can stop a seizure. The touch can induce a change in existential attitude because the body does not manifest an (otherwise independent) attitude, but enters into it. Similarly, the explanation of a symptom does not imply conjecture about hidden experiences; rather, it requires understanding the symptom's function in generating the meaning that is being expressed by it. We can draw a consequence, which, however, Merleau-Ponty himself did not mention, that the therapeutic change consists in a shift in production of bodily expression. Thus, this strong concept of expression could explain the effectiveness of bodily anchored interventions in psychotherapy.

4. Affective intentionality

If the body can influence our overall attitudes, it is clear that its nature is not entirely different from that of existence. In the example of sexual desire, Merleau-Ponty shows that affections represent a kind of intentionality. By this, he rejects the idea that attraction could be a connection between bodily states of pleasure and mental representations of the other. Instead, he analyses the situation of attraction in its meaning. Erotic attraction is first and foremost a general atmosphere in which we perceive others in their sexual physiognomy and in which we are more sensitive to hidden hints and suggestions in their behavior. Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 172) compares sensual desire to sensory perception: "Sexuality emanates like an odour or a sound from the bodily region that it occupies most specifically." Body is not present in the erotic situation only through sensations of pleasure but it is simultaneously called by the other and preparing for sexual behavior. Moreover, to be attracted to

somebody is not just a kind of urge that would seek a discharge of energy accumulated in the nerves; rather, the situation is permeated by power relations, which Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 170) describes as a master–slave dialectic. When I long for someone, I am at the mercy of her because I make myself dependant on her answer. Nevertheless, if she responds to my desire and is seduced by me, she is at my mercy. Sexuality thus transcends the order of nature because it establishes a series of intersubjective relationships in which the subject of desire gets involved.

In this expanded concept of sexuality, Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 161) feels to be at one with Freud, who does not restrict libido to a reproductive instinct but rather conceives it as an ability to enter situations and adopt attitudes that have wider than sexual signification. For this reason, even behavior at first glance asexual may raise the suspicion of being sexually motivated, and virtually everything may turn out to be a sexual symbol. In this respect, wakeful life is no different from a dream in which arousal is translated into images.⁶ The dreamer experiences sexual arousal directly in the form, for example, of a wall he is trying to climb. To say, as Freud does, however, that besides the manifest content of the dream the dreamer experiences an unconscious idea that mediates the connection of desire with the image, is according to Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 171) an unnecessary construction. There is no repressed idea that would return in the shape of an image. Rather, the image is full of a sexual atmosphere that the dreamer immediately understands. For Merleau-Ponty, desire is present in perception in the same way as it is present in the dream image. In addition, in the dream image, it is present in the same way as the existential attitude is present in the symptom. All these cases point to the ambiguity of bodily existence.

Nonetheless, for any reader of Freud, the ambiguity of human behavior is hardly a surprising claim. After all, psychoanalysis is based on the fact that mental contents are over-determined and that their meaning depends on multiple unconscious thoughts condensed in them.⁷ Does “existential ambiguity” bring anything new at all? Merleau-Ponty approaches the problem of the unconscious with a phenomenological ambition to describe experience as we experience it, rather than interpreting it from the viewpoint of a hypothesis. Thus, he asks how the “over-determined experience” is understood before it becomes the object of an explicit (e.g. psychoanalytic) interpretation; in other words, how it is reflected in our behavior and how we perceive it. Merleau-Ponty aims at the *experience* of ambiguity. Concepts such as “blind recognition”, “atmosphere of perception,” or “expression that becomes its own

⁶ Cf. PhP: 223: “Every sensation includes a seed of dream [...]”

⁷ Cf. Laplanche, Pontalis 1988: 292f.

meaning” do not capture experience by marking out units of meaning that could be combined or “condensed” in it. Rather, they are means of describing a certain field in which meanings are found at once and in an indistinguishable way, but which is still perfectly definite and specific in what it makes possible for us to do and think. As far as existence consists of transpositions of thoughts and drives into perception and behavior, the concept of ambivalence coincides with that of over-determination. As far as there is no original of this translation, i.e. no drive or thought without behavior or perception, they differ. According to Merleau-Ponty, the human existence desires by perception and thinks by behavior, e.g. by images charged by drive and behavior eluding a certain area of life. The very terms “transposition” or “translation” should therefore be treated with caution, whilst they cannot be avoided.

5. Body schema

The concept of body schema had a fundamental influence on Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of these “silent transpositions.”⁸ The body schema designates a complex sensorimotor unity of body, which neurology studies primarily by comparing disorders and illusions with normal behavior. For instance, in case of *allochiria*, the patient experiences the stimuli that one side of body is exposed to on the other side. It follows that we do not feel a sensation simply where the nerve was irritated, but the body determines its position according to a schema, which we do not explicitly perceive and which can be affected by various disorders.

Here, the body schema will not be expounded in all its forms; we confine ourselves to a discussion of four domains: 1. the relationship between perceptions of different sensory organs; 2. the relationship between perception and movement of one’s own body; 3. awareness of the position of the body in space; and 4. the relationship of the will to the body.

1. The experience of different senses is integrated so that the sensory qualities of one sense are indicated by sensory qualities of another sense. In common perception, this inter-sensory unity is found in cases of synaesthesia. For instance, velvet smoothness is not perceived by touch only; thanks to the arrangement of visible elements, we can literally see it. 2. Sensorimotor unity designates the adaptation of a movement to current situation. For example, in the model-based drawing, we

⁸ Merleau-Ponty mentions the concept of body schema towards the conclusion of the chapter on sexuality. (PhP: 172.) In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the greatest attention is paid to it in the chapter on spatiality and motricity. (PhP: 100ff.) Later, the body schema is extensively discussed in lectures *Le Monde Sensible et le monde de l’expression* from 1953. (MSME: 126ff.)

let sight lead the hand instead of giving attention to the emerging sketch and drawing the model by memory. 3. Even during a complex motion, we do not need to calculate position of parts of our own body, but we know on the fly where to find them. Likewise, during any activity, we take our whole body into account, not just the parts that we see, feel or otherwise perceive right now. 4. To have a body means that it is at our immediate disposal. Our intentions move the part of the body that is appropriate to the task, without our needing to consciously choose which one it will be.

By these translations and transpositions Merleau-Ponty (PhP: 243f.) believed to reach the essence of living body: “my body is precisely a ready-made system of equivalences and of inter-sensory transpositions. The senses translate each other without the need for an interpreter; they understand each other without having to pass through the idea.” The term “equivalence” specifies how Merleau-Ponty understands meaning of body “translations”. In the above example, visual and tactile configurations have *the same value* for the perception of velvet smoothness. Alternatively, when we imitate movements of another, for example, when we learn to dance, we do not need to control which movement of our body responds to which movement of our partner. We perceive directly whether the movements match each other, and thus have the same value, or not.

In all these cases, according to Merleau-Ponty, we are not only confronted with the same type of relationships but also with a certain kind of generality. Transpositions are immediate, i.e. not mediated by explicit awareness, and at the same time, they are not simply given but they progress according to a certain pattern. Merleau-Ponty (MSME: 133) states that the schema is both “specific,” while “indicating the general” and it “bestows meaning” as “a digest that we do not need to interpret”. This generality is further defined as “norm” (MSME: 131, 139, 143) and specific behavior as a “divergence” from this norm. (MSME: 143.) Thus, behavior is grounded in a sensorimotor norm, according to which perception or movement is taking place. This standard sums up past experience and therefore, in logical and temporal terms, precedes current experience. At the same time, however, it is “imminent” (MSME: 139) in the present experience because behavior also expresses the norm under which it is taking place.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the body schema is the basis of action, knowledge, including science, relations to others, including social relations, and expression in all forms, including art. As the lowest level of norms according to which our activities take place, it provides solid dispositions to higher ways of using body. For instance, we can concentrate on what others say because we master the phonetic side of language. These higher activities are then deposited in the body schema and affect it, thus

changing the basis of future behavior and perception. In this sense: “The body is the vehicle of being in the world” (PhP: 84) and “our general means of having a world.” (PhP: 147.)

What does the concept of body schema imply for the interpretation of the unconscious? The unconscious, no matter if a complex or repression, is based on body schema that it further transforms by creating a set of equivalences as a new standard for behavior and perception. From Merleau-Ponty’s remarks (MSME: 159), some specific traits of the unconscious as a norm can be deduced. Firstly, the modification of body use follows from the sexual drive. Further, as it corresponds to the above-mentioned broader concept of sexuality, the development of libido, and hence the relationship to one’s own body, is intertwined with the development of intersubjective relations. Merleau-Ponty adopts Lacan’s interpretation of the mirror stage and holds it that the body schema encompasses the view of ourselves as others see us. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, the unconscious life is, on the one hand, interpreted in terms of modification of the body schema; on the other hand, the integration of drive into the body schema extends this concept beyond its original neurological use and opens it to results of the psychoanalytic investigation of intersubjectivity.

6. Conclusion

Instead of a hidden experience, i.e. experience in another mental place, Merleau-Ponty, in his first two books, understands the unconscious as an ambiguous consciousness. The ambiguity is defined gradually as bad habit that retains a reference to the adequate behavior; bad faith, i.e. a double relationship to one’s own experiences; bodily expression that signifies itself; drive that opaquely motivates behavior; and finally, body schema as a translation without the original and a behavioral norm.

These terms do not describe different ambiguities, but rather one essential feature of incarnate existence from different sides. Therefore, each of these concepts can be specified in terms of the others. The body schema is a model for understanding how drive is present in behavior. Similarly, the symptom can be understood as a special case of the body schema. At the same time, while defining the schematism, Merleau-Ponty uses the term “translation”, which is a meaning *expressed* in another language. Therefore, just as one can delimit body expression as a case of schema, the body schema can be understood as a case of expression. This is evidenced by the fact that the absence of the original of translation implies

that the expression expresses itself, whilst, on the contrary, if the expression expresses itself, it cannot be fully determined by an original.

A similarly “ambivalent” relationship is found between the concepts of habit and body schema. Merleau-Ponty sometimes (PhP: 89) uses the term “habitual body” where he otherwise speaks of “body schema” instead. He also calls one’s own body “the primordial habit” (PhP: 93) and explicitly propounds to clarify the notion of body schema by means of the concept of habit (PhP: 526, fn. 115; 146; 247). Habits also provide the main source of how we should understand the general character of the body. (PhP: 139.) However, a reversed explanatory order between concepts of habit and body schema can be found in Merleau-Ponty as well. Thus, habits are “but a mode of the power of body” (PhP: 148) and “acquiring a habit” is “reworking and renewal of the body schema” (PhP: 143). This suggests that we should explain habits by means of the concept of body schema, rather than body schema by means of the concept of habit. Since both terms are explained by means of the other, it cannot be argued that the notion of habit, which grounds the approach to the unconscious in the *Structure of Behavior*, is replaced by the notion of body schema in the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Nevertheless, a certain shift can be observed with regard to the overall approach to psychoanalysis. In the *Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty categorically asserts that the term “fragmentary” or “primitive behavior” is sufficient to explain unconscious formations. (SB: 178f.) However, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, where neurological disorders, such as the phantom limb, are to be clarified, he resorts to the concept of “repression”. (PhP: 85, 88.)⁹ When he returns to the question of the phantom limb in the later lectures, he even considers “defensive mechanisms against disease” as part of the body. (MSME: 137.) This change in approach to psychoanalytic concepts reflects how Merleau-Ponty shifts from the influence of Goldstein, under the influence of Schilder.¹⁰

Among the terms by means of which Merleau-Ponty specifies the ambiguous character of existence, bad faith has a special place. Unlike others, bad faith does not concern how the subject relates to the world, but how one relates to one’s own experiences. If the habit and body schema are explained by Merleau-Ponty, finally, as forms of operative intentionality, i.e. as a kind of consciousness, bad faith denotes a relationship of the subject to this intentionality; that is to say, a form of self-consciousness. The ambivalence of bad faith consists in a double relation to one’s

⁹ Merleau-Ponty also calls organism, whose definition of “anonymous existence” coincides with the definition of the body, as the “innate complex”, which is continuously being repressed by the personal life. (PhP: 86.)

¹⁰ Cf. Goldstein 1995: 253f. and Schilder 2000: 32.

own experiences, while the ambivalence of habit, schema or expression consists in a double relation to the environment. Thus, Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest that the subject is generally and “blindly” aware even of the “silent transpositions” of the body schema.

This summary makes it possible to designate one problematic spot in Merleau-Ponty’s early approach to the notion of the unconscious. In the *Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty claims that we resort to an unconscious behavior because it is easier for us than the integrated behavior. It is, therefore, similar to a habit that we adhere to not because we cannot do otherwise, but because we are not in need to act otherwise. Later development only refines this approach but does not change it essentially. However, Freud’s description of psychoanalytic therapy offers a different picture of the unconscious. According to Freud (1964: 147), the technique of therapy consists in the analyst’s recognizing the patient’s resistances and making them conscious to the patient. Once the patient has worked through their resistance, repressed connections occur to them. I believe that this resistance, whose surmounting is marked by unbidden thoughts, cannot be found in the case of habit breaking. Habit involves inertia, repression entails resistance. Moreover, although, in the course of life, habit and repression often come together, the explanation of repression as a form of habit misses the specificity of the psychoanalytic concept. This omission is not accidental, but rather reflects the fact that Merleau-Ponty hardly even addresses the therapy situation. However, a description of the patient’s behavior during treatment is one of the roots of the theory of the unconscious. Therefore, despite its ingenuity, it remains doubtful whether Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ambiguous existence covers all the experiences indicated by the original concept of the unconscious.

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CONTEMPLATION ET MYTHOSOPHIE: L'AMPHIBOLIE DES PAYSAGES DANS L'ŒUVRE D'ERNST JÜNGER

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ABSTRACT. *Contemplation and Mythosophy: the Amphiboly of Landscapes in the Works of Ernst Jünger.* Ernst Jünger's immanent mythology of vitalism hasn't as yet found its place in Modernity, being regarded as suspect or unworthy of any "serious" post-metaphysical approach. Nevertheless, its original significance is manifest in the spatial descriptions that deploy a genuine polymorphism of human, nature and an archetypal Aesthetics. Jünger's landscapes thus express at least two different levels of amphiboly that encompass his status as a specific literary figure, apart from both Metaphysics and Deconstruction. His "solutions", varying throughout the evolution of his work, aim the enigmatic and unthinkable articulation of Myth and History, the topological frontiers between creative decision and the vertical advent of an injunction, open like a wound towards the Faustian destiny.

Keywords: *contemplation, mythosophy, landscape, vitalism, creation, frontier, topology.*

1. Introduction

Tout vitalisme manifeste a été mal reçu (et même condamné rétroactivement) par l'esprit érudit de la modernité tardive, lorsqu'il s'agissait soit d'une exaltation de l'énergie mystique du vivant, soit d'un symbolisme magique qui faisait appel aux dieux cachés dans la contiguïté du Mythe et de l'Histoire¹. Même la phénoménologie post-husserlienne s'est montrée peu habile à aborder ce qu'on peut appeler la *mythologie immanente* de l'énergie vitale – malgré la "popularité" artistique de celle-ci durant le XXe siècle –, toujours poussée dans un arrière-plan esthétique, ontologiquement déficitaire par rapport au langage. L'euphémisme *littérature pure*,

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¹ L'idiosyncrasie entre la nouvelle sacralité du surréalisme et la désagregation structuraliste en est une preuve évidente.

étrangement revendiqué même par les plus postmodernes à l'égard de la tradition occidentale millénaire – en s'appuyant presque tout le temps sur le stéréotype platonicien (parfois mal entendu) de la République – est l'expression forte d'un tel exil. S'agit-il d'un des derniers efforts de maintenir une séparation « rationaliste », en dépit de la réhabilitation des « vécus »² qui semblait définitive et de l'accroissement actuel de la philosophie du vivant³, ou bien d'un symptôme névrotique (parmi plusieurs autres) de l'épuisement⁴ tant commenté? De toute manière, on retient l'éloignement du discours philosophique hypertélique de toute esthétisation vitaliste⁵. La tendance à refouler hâtivement le vitalisme, en le maîtrisant⁶ ou en le dénonçant, coupe l'accès à une mytosophie qualifiée a priori comme louche. En outre, les implications idéologiques imminentes exigent toujours ou bien une purification déontologique ou bien l'exil (mentionné en dessus) dans une herméneutique esthétique régionale.

Toutes ces tendances vers le vitalisme mythique sont identifiables dans le contexte du cas Jünger, en ce qui concerne les controverses portant sur sa place dans le canon moderne. La démonisation acerbe semble parfois se réunir paradoxalement avec l'exaltation aveugle de son œuvre dans l'étroit cercle des interprétations idéologiques – littérature fasciste selon les détracteurs⁷ et critique allégorique du totalitarisme (d'une ainsi dite conscience morale supérieure) selon les partisans⁸. Or, l'originalité d'Ernst Jünger reste, même en englobant au niveau strictement littéraire ses « pêchés

² En commençant avec Bergson et en passant par le premier Heidegger (la phénoménologie de l'angoisse et la récupération de la tradition kairotique chrétienne), par Levinas (l'analytique de la souffrance et de la jouissance) et, pas en dernier lieu, par la psychanalyse de Freud et Lacan, pour noter seulement les repères les plus importantes de la phénoménologie du corps et de la corporéité.

³ Durand, Jung ou Eliade ne semblent-ils désuets pour et selon l'actuelle philosophie de la vie, tout en reconnaissant leur importance "archéologique"?

⁴ Notamment au sens de Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe.

⁵ Dans sa hantise pour le langage, la philosophie *posthistorique* devient sceptique à l'égard du langage vivant des époques *historiques*, autant qu'elle s'efforce de corriger (parfois très violemment) tout enthousiasme malade, confus et surtout fanatique. Or, le fanatisme est le point le plus délicat du miroitement de la modernité, qui tend à dégager toutes les forces obscures de son image à la fois rationaliste et postrationaliste.

⁶ L'anthropologie structuraliste de Lévi-Strauss ou le cliché de l'ambiguïté du sacré, de Otto à Callois et même à Girard dans une certaine mesure, sont des perspectives réductionnistes, pas au sens péjoratif, mais à l'égard de l'univocité qui refuse au sacré et au mythique leur dimension vitale et, implicitement, leur dynamisme réel.

⁷ Voir Michel Vanoosthuyse, *Fascisme & littérature pure. La fabrique d'Ernst Jünger*, Marseille, Agone, 2005, *passim*.

⁸ Dans les deux cas, Jünger est presque réduit à une esthétisation du politique (et de la guerre – condamnée par Walter Benjamin). C'est précisément le modernisme esthétique qui serait le précurseur du nazisme dont Jünger se serait fait coupable dans sa jeunesse.

idéologiques », en deçà des contradictions qui portent sur son œuvre et aussi des allégories antitotalitaires considérées par ses admirateurs⁹; elle consiste dans le vitalisme à la fois esthétique et mythosopique¹⁰ de ses descriptions spatiales¹¹. Activisme et désinvolture, distance et engagement, toujours à la marge des forces vitales qui joignent la topo-logie et la mytho-logie dans un espace morphologique hors-catégoriel. On trouve tous ceux-ci dans les paysages jüngeriens, intimement liés à la disposition de contemplation; on y rencontre la rêverie d'un réalisme magique originel¹² et les portées symboliques des images qui rendent compte d'un polymorphisme¹³ déployé aux différents niveaux: le microcosme des insectes ou des serpents, les villes utopiques, la guerre vécue à travers les images presque oniriques, les imbrications variées des paysages naturels (notamment dans *Sur les falaises de marbre*). Mais ce qui surprend le plus, c'est la double amphibolie. Premièrement, celle des paysages sauvages-artificiels – les villes utopiques ou les champs de bataille qui ne sont pas du tout dépourvus de la nature: l'immanence de l'intervention humaine (en fait, une expression de la métaphysique de la vie héritée de Nietzsche et de Schopenhauer, dans une perspective anti-hégélienne) se mêle avec l'organicisme naturel mythique. Deuxièmement, une amphibolie d'inspiration animiste, intrinsèque aux formes naturelles et à leur métamorphose élémentaire permanente. D'une côté l'emboîtement du Mythe et de l'Histoire (humaine) qui laisse son empreinte¹⁴ dans la nature, et d'autre, le polymorphisme micro et macrocosmique¹⁵.

⁹ Parmi lesquels Frederic de Towarnicki ou Julien Hervier.

¹⁰ Pas simplement mythologique, puisqu'il renvoie toujours à une conception organiciste du monde et à la "sagesse" mythique refoulée qui doit être redécouverte dans la « miroiterie » de la modernité. D'ailleurs, Peter Klossowski voit chez Jünger, dans l'ensemble de ses écrits, une démarche qui vise "l'épos de la modernité" caché et en même temps révélé par la philosophie de l'histoire – les trois *typos*: le guerrier, le travailleur et le titan en sont les figures remarquables, avec une nuance presque schopenhaurienne.

¹¹ Celles littéraires – de journaux ou de fiction –, mais aussi celles attachées aux réflexions philosophiques – qui rendent compte de leur appartenance à un paradigme où Kafka et Buzzatti s'inscrivent aussi, mais qui renvoie, plus que les affinités avec les écrivains "canoniques", à une contemplation organiciste des paysages emblématiques.

¹² Puisqu'il est, si on pourrait dire, "plus vitaliste" que celui de Marquez ou de Fowles.

¹³ La descendance goethéenne est invoquée plusieurs fois par Jünger.

¹⁴ La loi du marquage et du sceau semble constante dans la doctrine de l'histoire chez Jünger, peut-être comme une réminiscence spengliérienne, en dépassant la théorie du *Gestalt* dans *l'Arbeiter*.

¹⁵ Selon François Poncet, "La vague, Leitmotiv jüngerien" in *Images d'Ernst Jünger*, textes réunis par Danièle Bertrand-Vidal, Éditions Peter Lang, 1996, p. 86: "Chez Jünger, la vague marine reconduit à l'onde microphysique, [...] du domaine traditionnel de l'image visible à celui du « motif » d'un schème de vibration ondulatoire localisé dans la profondeur de la matière élémentaire, des micro-particules [...] il s'applique de manière universelle à tous les registres de la réalité".

2. Le paysage de la guerre. Ambiguïté et “nostalgie de l’élémentaire”

Bien que l’œuvre de jeunesse ait été toujours rénégée (parfois par Jünger lui-même), il s’y agit de plus qu’une esthétisation puérile de la guerre et de l’horreur ou de la boutade biologiste *Blut und Boden*¹⁶. Les *Orages d’acier*, malgré l’écart par rapport aux écrits ultérieurs, peuvent être approchés de celles-ci en vertu de l’expressionnisme aigu qui se borne à ce que Michel Palmier appelle le réalisme de la *Nouvelle objectivité*: “À chaque pas, ils découvrent les mêmes visions d’apocalypse: villages en ruine, forêts en flammes, trous d’obus dans lesquels gisent des corps des soldats mutilés et décomposés. [...] Le lecteur n’ignore rien de la construction de chaque tranchée, de sa géométrie kafkaïenne [...] Jünger n’omet ni les étincelles qui jaillissent lorsqu’un éclat d’obus frappe un conglomérat de pyrite de fer ou la description des ammonites dans le sol crayeux de la tranchée”¹⁷. En outre, l’effet sonore de la guerre complète le spectacle d’un paysage contradictoire: l’énergie vitale déployée et décrite par cette sorte de “réalisme héroïque” se confond avec la musicalité lourde des schrapnelles, la force sacrée de l’orage qui à la fois soumet et imite (une *mimésis* complètement hors de la prise humaine) l’hybris naturelle, en engendrant un paysage-hybride, le support pour un “langage des symboles statiques”: “... nous tendîmes l’oreille au rythme lent des laminoirs du front, mélodie [...] qui allait nous devenir familière. Très loin, la boucle blanche d’un schrapnell fondait dans le ciel gris de décembre”¹⁸.

L’ambiguïté de l’orage comme telle est d’ailleurs symptomatique pour l’épiphanie d’un nouveau monde et on peut comprendre que l’intuition esthétique du jeune Jünger rendait déjà visible un vitalisme difficile à analyser, par ces descriptions qui englobent à la fois les structures techniques abyssales (analysées scrupuleusement dans *Der Arbeiter*) et la *mimésis* dévastatrice, “orageuse”, de la guerre. La “fascination”, reprise dans *Sturm* et dans *La Guerre comme expérience intérieure*¹⁹, vise à comprendre cet accroissement sensoriel dans le contexte d’un paysage où l’*Erlebnis* devient (comme vécu par excellence amphibolique) l’ouverture vers une catharsis ultérieure, incertaine même pour le spectateur-soldat. On est loin donc d’une rudimentaire

¹⁶ En outre, en ce qui concerne *Der Arbeiter*, l’histoire de sa réception et l’intérêt archiconnu de Heidegger envers le problème du nihilisme qu’il implique, sont devenus en quelque sorte une marque de l’ambiguïté idéologique jüngerienne, en couvrant les enjeux esthétiques du livre.

¹⁷ Jean-Michel Palmier, *Ernst Jünger. Rêveries sur un chasseur de cicindèles*, Hachette, 1995, p. 18-19.

¹⁸ Ernst Jünger, *Orages d’acier*, Christian Bourgois, 1970, p. 11.

¹⁹ La démarche de ce pseudo-journal est similaire à la stylistique de Romain Rolland. En effet, la correspondance de Jünger entre la matière extérieure du paysage de guerre (qui a son beauté à soi, glorifié plus explicitement que dans les *Orages d’acier*) et le lyrisme intérieur de la souffrance. Bref, un paysage “total”.

esthétique macabre, même si on peut identifier dans l'éloge du tourbillon sanglant une réification messianique douteuse. En effet, la musicalité soutient la force vitale et la nature reçoit, par une mystique du sacrifice, le passage zénithal à une conscience supérieure de son propre chair²⁰, contemplation révérencieuse d'une guerre héraclitéenne qui est "le père de tous"²¹ et, surtout, nostalgie de l'élémentaire qui s'y déploie sous la forme de ce paysage ambigu (en englobant le vécu abyssal – en ce qui concerne le désespoir et les chutes – et celui zénithal – élevé par l'épiphanie qu'il engendre dans le silence comme "langage primordial" de la dynamique explosive de la bataille). Il ne s'agit point d'une esthétique de la guerre comme telle (Jünger ne glorifie et ne contemple jamais avec fascination le parfum de la mort ou les cadavres démembrés), mais de la contemplation active et existentialiste d'un paysage ambigu dans le sens radical du vitalisme et de l'organicisme, où chair et "métal tuant" se fondent ensemble au sein de la nature élémentaire. D'ailleurs, Jünger reprend ce motif dans une remarque aphoristique de *La mobilisation totale* – dans un contexte très différent, celui de l'analyse du rapport entre la technique et l'essence de l'homme, mais qui exprime toutefois la spécificité "uniformisante" et "silencieuse" du paysage de guerre, en poussant le polymorphisme initial jusqu'à l'anamorphisme: le volcan où "la diversité des paysages s'efface à mesure où on s'approche de la rage ardente du cratère."²²

3. Les "paysages" sans description de l'*Arbeiter*

On trouve l'épiphanie cathartique dans la célèbre théorie de la *Gestalt*; si dans les *Orages d'acier*, le paysage sanglant était lié à la mystique du sacrifice, ici l'espace technique est l'empreinte d'une totalité régie par la figure²³ de l'*Arbeiter*, dans une perspective qui "n'est accessible ni à l'idéalisme, ni au matérialisme, mais qu'il faut qualifier de Réalisme Héroïque"²⁴. La prétendue indifférence à l'égard de la destruction de la nature (paradoxale vu les principes toujours organicistes) ne peut être qu'un faux reproche à un "observateur amateur", quoique militant, pour lequel l'homme atteint sa "naturalité" vitale en s'élevant (existentiellement, par un saut qualitatif presque kierkegaardien) aux formes pures de son individualité.

²⁰ Le contexte d'une métaphysique nietzschéenne des valeurs est évident.

²¹ Même si Héraclit n'a jamais parlé d'une guerre vue et vécue.

²² Ernst Jünger, *La mobilisation totale*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, p. 93.

²³ La plurivocité du terme allemand *Gestalt* (forme, figure, configuration) permet à Jünger d'accentuer "l'au-delà" de l'*Arbeiter* et justifie en quelque mesure les traits non-idéologiques de sa démarche.

²⁴ Ernst Jünger, *Le Travailleur*, Christian Bourgois, 1993, p. 66.

La dimension cosmique²⁵, présentée avec une emphase sans vraisemblance avec l'idéologie politique, de la *Gestalt* du travailleur est l'expression d'un espace (au-delà de des *Orages d'acier*) où le paysage spectaculaire de la technique moderne, ayant le "moteur" comme symbole emblématique, tout comme celui de la guerre, s'accomplit toujours par la nature dans une amphibolie parabolique: "...il est de la plus haute importance que la Figure ne soit pas soumise aux éléments du feu et de la terre, et que de ce fait l'homme comme Figure appartienne à l'éternité [...] la possibilité d'une anarchie gaie coïncide avec l'ordre plus strict – un spectacle qui s'ébauche déjà dans les grandes batailles et les cités géantes. [...] le moteur [...] c'est le jouet audacieux d'un type d'homme capable de se faire sauter en l'air avec joie, en voyant dans cet acte une confirmation de l'ordre. [...] l'individu aussi possède une Figure et le droit vital, inaliénable et sublime qu'il partage avec les pierres, les plantes, les animaux et les étoiles, c'est son droit à la Figure". Il est très étonnant que les villes industrielles pourraient combler paradoxalement le déficit épistémologique de l'homme à l'égard de la nature. En tout cas, l'idéal de *Ganzheit*²⁶ (inspiré par la fascination pour Goethe) – expression du mépris à l'égard de l'utilitarisme libéral incarné dans les "paysages informels de chantiers"²⁷ – rend compte des images mythiques forgées par la nature-même et dont la sagesse se mire à la fois dans la guerre apothéotique et dans les cimes du travail²⁸ (tous les deux ont comme support une mystique du sacrifice), dont les "paysages planifiés"²⁹ ne sont pas un résultat (vu la dimension anti-téléologique de la mystique du travail), mais la forme métaphysique vivante.

Ce n'est pas par hasard que Jünger utilise aussi souvent le terme "paysage" sans décrire proprement les espaces figuratifs qu'il invoque. Les paysages qu'on s'efforce de contempler ne sont pas seulement des simples métaphores ou des figures-images allégoriques, il ne s'agit tant d'une esthétique que d'une esthésiologie des "formes typiques" par lesquelles le travailleur peut se définir "naturellement": "là où la nature donne figure, elle apporte un soin infiniment plus grand à la représentation et au maintien des formes typiques qu'à la différenciation... Partout

²⁵ Dans une perspective pascalienne, avec son ordre propre (de *typos*), qui appelle l'ordre naturel.

²⁶ Dans un sens totalement différent de celui utilisé par Heidegger qui se réfère à l'intégralité du *Dasein*.

²⁷ Voir *Le Travailleur*, p. 367: "52. Nous vivons dans un monde encore très instable 53. qui commence toutefois à se distinguer du caractère explosif et dynamique du premier paysage des chantiers par une planification et une prévisibilité accrue des événements."

²⁸ Puisque le travailleur est le seul capable d'assumer la domination nécessaire d'un monde menacé par le nihilisme. D'où "l'optimisme" en ce qui concerne l'affranchissement de la ligne du nihilisme accompli, contesté par Heidegger.

²⁹ Un point sur lequel Lukacs a soutenu que le mythe du travailleur est "le mythe de l'imperialisme belliqueux et agressif", en anticipant Rosenberg et l'idéologie naziste.

dans la nature nous rencontrons entre le sceau et la frappe un rapport supérieur au rapport entre cause et effet"³⁰. Voilà un dépassement de la nostalgie de l'élémentaire et du paysage de guerre simplement "sacré" en faveur d'un vitalisme cette fois prescriptif et d'une "l'impidité" existentielle qui saisit les imbrications de la *Gestalt*.

4. Le centre hiératique et la géographie mythique du Midi

Dans *Le mur du temps*, Jünger affirme que l'homme a su conquérir l'espace et a perdu le temps. Cependant, la poésie et le mythe (voire l'astrologie) restent le refuge de l'éternité kaïrotique, de même que pour Heidegger le Rhin élogié par Hölderlin déborde (encore) le *Gestell* et la *Zeitlichkeit* des grandes hydrocentrales westphaliennes. Or, il y a toujours (au-delà du style aphoristique) un âge mythique (la présupposition de l'immémorial) qui perdure dans les écrits fictionnelles de Jünger, comme ancestralité vive, à travers un espace qui ne se conquiert jamais, mais s'élargit dans l'histoire vécue, en déployant sa morphologie pour "l'œil" ekstatique³¹.

On trouve ainsi dans les écrits d'après-guerre les desiderata de la contemplation et aussi le substrat mythosopique, cette fois renforcé par une symbolistique très riche. Certes, beaucoup de paysages anonymes de ses longs voyages ont inspiré les métonymies de l'entomologiste Jünger, mais, comme il avoue lui-même à propos des jardins, les plus fascinantes et "exotiques" sont celles où "il n'est se jamais promené"³². Un pareil "exotisme" à la limite du figuratif est dominant dans toutes les trois œuvres où l'espace est fondé sur une "géométrie concave" et ouverte, et sur la géographie mythique de l'immémorial: *Sur les falaises de marbre* (1939), *Héliopolis* (1949) et *Eumeswil* (1977). La récurrence des images évoquant et invoquant (précisément au sens de l'immémorial) le paysage de l'Europe méridionale et, en même temps, tendant vers une morphologie abstraite, est accablante.

Julien Gracq affirme que *Les falaises de marbre* doit être lu comme un livre emblématique³³ où le caractère purement symbolique exprime le conflit universel entre désert et forêt, nihilisme et anarchie. Le Midi en soi devient dans une telle

³⁰ *Le Travailleur*, p. 278-280.

³¹ Sans détailler ici, la vision jüngerienne de la temporalité est vraisemblable à celle de *Sein und Zeit*, v. Jünger, *Strahlungen II*, p. 60.

³² *Le Travailleur*, p. 56. Les voyages méridionaux, en bénéficiant des descriptions denses, sont les plus appréciés dans le journal, en englobant les îles méditerranéens, le Portugal, le sud de l'Italie et l'Afrique du Nord.

³³ Julien Gracq, *Œuvres complètes*, Gallimard, 1989, p. 977-978.

perspective (encore influencée par la doctrine spenglerienne) l'allégorie d'une déchéance synoptique des civilisations florissantes. Or, les paysages baignés du soleil rendent toujours compte d'un centre³⁴ irrégulier géométriquement, ils correspondent à l'ordre mythologique de cette "effusion" méridionale qui survit à ses extensions matérielles. Ainsi, les falaises, comme centre topo-logique (extension horizontale amphibolique du sacré et du profane) et, simultanément en tant que sommet "imagogique"³⁵ (la hauteur n'est pas seulement verticalité de l'*axis mundi* puisqu'il est point de rencontre – donc de nouveau amphibolique – entre l'abysal et le zénithal, une obsession pérenne, comme on a déjà vu, de Jünger) sont le "milieu" emblématique de la discontinuité spatiale en vertu de leur ouverture vers la transcendance spatio-temporel. L'ascension³⁶ témoigne de la géographie mythique qui provoque cette rupture, en estompant les formes au profit de l'ouverture géométrique pure, où les traces du mythe, comme celles de l'histoire, s'effacent et où la cécité phénoménale engendre chez le narrateur et chez le frère Othon une révélation ésotérique de l'*imago mundi*: "Cependant que nous nous élevons, nous nous rapprochons du mystère que la poussière nous dérobe. Ainsi se résorbe, à chaque pas que nous faisons sur la montagne, le dessin confus des horizons et, lorsque nous sommes parvenu assez haut, nous ne sommes plus environnés, en quelque lieu que nous soyons, que par un pur anneau qui nous fiance à l'éternité"³⁷. Néanmoins, l'ascension n'est jamais accomplie, puisque les brefs moments des promenades révélatrices sont remémorés sous les auspices d'une histoire déjà déchuée, sous le signe de l'anéantissement menaçant incarné par la figure du Grand Forestier³⁸. L'alternance des sphères (qui n'empêche pas du tout la récurrence des hauteurs) s'impose donc, en renvoyant le lecteur vers les tourbillons des terres en bas des falaises.

³⁴ Isabelle Rozet, "Jünger, ce fugitif de l'histoire" in *Images d'Ernst Jünger, op. cit.*, p. 61: "Ce symbolisme d'une quête du centre, d'une association du sacré et du profane s'est effacé des productions littéraires modernes; il apparaît toutefois de manière allusive, mais persistante dans les écrits de Jünger".

³⁵ Le chemin vers le centre est abordé ici dans le sens d'Eliade.

³⁶ Les rites d'ascension ont été notés comme une constante religieuse universelle par Eliade, notamment dans *Images et symboles*.

³⁷ *Sur les falaises de marbre*, p. 35, apud. Danièle Bertrand-Vidal, "Images du paysage méditerranéen" in *Images d'Ernst Jünger, op. cit.*, p. 108.

³⁸ L'image du "Grand Forestier" a suscité autant des commentaires, qu'il serait superflu d'y s'attarder. "En 1939, l'auteur en avait donc assez vu pour appréhender les ravages qu'allait causer la barbarie nazie. [...] Il composait, comme il le dira plus tard, des images à double sens. Le récit de *Falaises de marbre* décrit donc, en utilisant le mythe, ce qui est en train de se passer en Allemagne par les figures qui représentent un certain type d'homme qui réapparaît [...] au cours des époques successives de l'Histoire ayant une fonction archétypale" (Danièle Bertrand-Vidal, *op. cit.*, p. 107).

La morphologie du paysage totalisateur se déploie donc dans les terrains vastes autour des falaises (le centre hiératique) – pas symétriquement, mais sous la forme d'un demi-cercle à travers d'un axe nord-sud: la région *Campagna* (terre plate intermédiaire des bergers et des nomades) et les paysages marécageux culminant avec les hautes forêts septentrionales (domaine obscur du Grand Forestier), d'un autre côté le pays de *Marina* et, lointainement, les cimes d'*Alta-Plana*, opposé diamétralement aux forêts³⁹. La *Marina* est l'espace de la plus haute civilisation⁴⁰, autant que l'expression de l'âge immémorial (d'où l'asymétrie topologique des régions), étant aussi la plus proche des falaises et la plus ensoleillée; c'est l'expression vivante de l'ancestralité glorieuse, dont le rayonnement du soleil et l'abondance nautique imprégnée par une spiritualité du *skholè* suscite le climat d'une praxis existentielle vitaliste: "La douceur du climat méditerranéen est évoquée par ces fleurs qui s'épanouissent toute l'année. Dans ce cadre paradisiaque règne l'abondance [...] La civilisation aux bords des flots a atteint le degré de raffinement le plus élevé qu'il y ait jamais eu. Cette contrée qui associe la mer, la lumière, la chaleur et la terre semble particulièrement propice à l'évolution de l'humanité aussi bien dans la vie de tous les jours que dans les domaines de la Culture."⁴¹

5. Le soleil rayonnant: sommet de la civilisation méridionale et péril du nihilisme

La lumière du soleil qui s'oppose à l'obscurité diabolique des grandes forêts (qui possède néanmoins une lumière...artificielle!), rend compte de l'obsession jüngerienne pour le méridional, étant un milieu pour la contemplation et en renvoyant toujours à l'immémorial. Elle rend manifeste la vision (précisée en dessus comme résultat de la cécité révélatrice) de la géographie mythique opposée au sublime kantien en vertu de sa dimension ouverte, en montrant la symbiose sacrée des étants naturels (du serpent aux vastes étendues fleuries), juste dans le moment où

³⁹ En fait, les forêts septentrionales ont une référence très ambiguë chez Jünger. Dans ses rencontres avec Antonio Gnoli et Franco Volpi, il affirme que la forêt est un lieu du mystère par excellence, en invoquant l'étymologie allemande de la patrie (*Heimat*), au sens où la propre maison (*Heim*) est mystérieuse (*Heimlich*). On n'est pas loin du lyrisme heideggerien de la Forêt Noire et de sa "angoisse lucide".

⁴⁰ Tandis que dans l'*Alta-Plana* règne une liberté sans substance et *Campagna* abrite une société primitive et médiocre dans sa platitude violente mais, en même temps, hospitalière et pas du tout maléfique, comme ont devenu les maurétains soumis au Grand Forestier. Ce qui exclut toute dichotomie de la structure narrative.

⁴¹ Danièle Bertrand-Vidal, *op. cit.*, p.110.

Marina est la plus menacée: “Parvenus sur l’arête extrême des falaises, qui se dressait dans l’ardeur méridienne et dominait les lointains de sa blancheur aveuglante nous contemplions longuement le pays [...] C’était alors comme nos yeux se dessillaient et [...] nous embrassions cette réalité dans sa splendeur impérissable. Et nous comprenions alors avec allégresse que la destruction demeure étrangère aux éléments et que son illusion roule à leur surface pareille au flot de fantômes brumeux analogue au brouillard des grandes forêts qui ne résistent point au soleil”⁴². Il en découle le réalisme magique⁴³ et aussi le deuxième sens de l’amphibolie. Le soleil fait voir la vulnérabilité du pays : Marina est vulnérable parce qu’elle est limitée et pas totalement mythique ou au moins il y a une incertitude dans ses origines mythico-historiques qui s’accouplent avec la splendeur de ses formes – à la fois nautique et terrestre.

Le soleil de Marina est une force révélatrice univoque, dans le contexte du centre hiératique des falaises et de la lutte (qui renvoie aux mythes cosmogoniques) pour l’héritage magique de la lumière même et de sa dimension vitale face au nihilisme: si Marina était détruite, le soleil tomberait sur un désert, il n’y aurait plus d’humanité pour en saisir la vérité par l’intermède du pain et du vin. Contrairement, le soleil d’*Héliopolis* est “immanentisé” – en correspondant avec le grandeur apollinique de la ville – et en même temps au sommet de ses forces, comme le montre le nom de la cité utopique; il baigne tous les paysages: les *Hésépérides* (terre “au-delà du rationnel”⁴⁴ – reprise du motif de la nostalgie de l’âge d’or), *Pagos* (montagne gnostique de l’intellect) *le Palais* (lieu de la réalité politique liée à la praxis vitale⁴⁵) et *l’Office central* (siège du tourbillon mécaniciste d’inspiration

⁴² Ernst Jünger, *Sur les falaises de marbre*, Gallimard, 1942, p. 111.

⁴³ Selon Julien Hervier, “Aspects d’une réception: Ernst Jünger dans la perspective de la confrontation franco-allemande” in *Images d’Ernst Jünger*, op. cit.: “Jünger illustre avec *Sur les falaises de marbre* son aptitude innée à faire passer dans une structure romanesque les forces du rêve, à tramer une action symbolique où les images-clefs de l’animalité et du pouvoir mythique, sans se perdre dans l’irréalité désincarnée des drames symboliques...”.

⁴⁴ Jünger lui-même en précise cette fois les connotations symboliques: “Par les «Hespérides», j’entends les pays situés au-delà du rationnel tandis que «Pagos» doit figurer une montagne où l’homme s’efforce d’atteindre à la saisie supérieure de l’être, et de le faire par les trois étapes de la magie, de la morale et de la théologie.” (*La cabagne dans la vigne*, Paris, Christian Bourgois, 1980, p. 280).

⁴⁵ “Sur le versant ouest se dressait, commandant la vieille ville, le palais proconsulaire. Il s’adosait à un fragment de l’ancien chateau de la ville. [...] Le monument ne manquait ni d’unité, ni de grandeur. [...] Il rassemblait au vêtement d’un grand seigneur qui, de siècle en siècle, est devenu plus commode. L’aigle avec le serpent était planté sur le donjon et, à la lumière du midi, contemplait au loin la mer.” (*Héliopolis*, Paris, Christian Bourgois, 1975, p. 69).

kafkaïenne): "Entre les deux caps, couronnés d'arbres sombres s'étagait dans un vaste hémicycle la ville de Héliopolis. [...] Elle scintillait au-dessus de la mer bleue, dans l'éclat du midi, qui buvait ses couleurs, tandis que le soleil du soir rappelait à la vie les pierres rougeâtres dont était bâtie la vieille ville. [...] Héliopolis la vieille ville, avec ses châteaux et ses palais, avec ses marchés et ses quartiers grouillants, se détachait sous le soleil dans toute sa force"⁴⁶.

Outre l'abondance nautique et la répétition du demi-cercle, qu'illustrent la symbolistique apparentée avec celle des *Falaises de marbre*, on distingue aussi un portrait de l'urbanité achevée, où le paysage planifié de l'*Arbeiter* s'était concrétisé en vertu d'une évolution brisante de la technique qui rappelle le *Gestell* heideggérien et l'uniformité organisée. On y remarque le dépassement définitif de l'expérience intellectuelle prescriptive de l'*Arbeiter*, puisqu'ici l'histoire vécue ne s'accomplit pas dans une répétition des fondements mythiques qui engendrerait des paysages sauvages-artificiels d'un monde nouveau, mais, contrairement, elle s'effondre dans une matérialité inerte (amplement décrite comme histoire morte et immobile, où l'idéal de la *mimesis* est complètement estompé), une ambiance vide où règne l'ennui et la complaisance, symptomatique déjà à travers la ville neuve d'*Héliopolis*: "La ville neuve, au contraire, avait été édiflée en marbre blanc [...] Le terrain été resté longtemps en ruine, jusqu'au jour où le progrès de la technique avait garanti l'atmosphère, et où le régent s'était réservé les armes lourdes.

C'est alors qu'on avait exécuté les plans d'urbanistes célèbres [...] Il régnait dans ces rues blanches, qui brillaient, même la nuit, d'une ivre lumière, une sorte de confort monotone"⁴⁷. Or le soleil n'éclaircit ici seulement la géographie mythique, celle de la vieille ville, avec l'archétypale cathédrale au centre, mais aussi le péril nihiliste qui gît au cœur de cette commodité uniforme (vraisemblable au paysage bourgeois des ateliers dénoncé dans l'*Arbeiter*) ; cette fois, sa lumière aveuglante, tout en restant révélatrice, n'est plus le signe d'une bienveillance mystique, mais celui d'un éclatement sombre, à partir duquel toute couleur s'évanouit: "la lumière est absolue et aveuglante, comme celle du désert. Son intensité empêche les images de se former. La couleur qui leur est indispensable n'apparaît que dans un *écrin d'obscurité*. Ce n'est qu'au moment où le soleil se couche que l'homme peut à nouveau contempler le paysage"⁴⁸. L'opposition avec le soleil des falaises est donc radicale et étonnante, puisque la contemplation même (finalité pour tout paysage mythique qui s'étend à travers le réel) est heurtée devant une lumière non plus reconnaissable.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68-70.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁴⁸ Danièle Bertrand-Vidal, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

En outre, l'amphibolie mythique-historique et technique-naturel (sauvage) prend une connotation péjorative, qui va être radicalisée dans *Eumeswil*, où la ville méridionale disparaît, après la chute de l'État mondial par une catastrophe nucléaire, dans "le désert, où ne poussait déjà qu'une maigre végétation, [...] entièrement calcinée". Évidemment, le temps mythique et la disposition à la contemplation (en tant que finalité humaine qui s'y joint) sont "perdus" par l'assujettissement gagné (au sens sarcastique) de l'espace "profane"⁴⁹.

6. Conclusions. Les frontières et l'emboîtement morphologique

Les paysages jüngeriens, à partir même des *Orages d'acier*, se dressent dans le contexte d'une mythosophie éclectique, qui englobe l'activisme le plus manifeste et la distance déférente face au dynamisme conjoint de l'homme et de la nature. Tout de même, on peut constater que le trajet de Jünger ne consiste pas à un abandon de l'activisme fanatique de jeunesse en faveur de la retraite "mature" dans une contemplation "solitaire", comme certains commentateurs le décrivent. Il s'agit plutôt d'un changement stylistique⁵⁰: de l'expressionnisme brut des *Orages* à la théorie de la *Gestalt* de l'*Arbeiter* et, finalement, au réalisme magique des trois grandes œuvres fictionnelles.

L'emboîtement morphologique est lié à la contiguïté du Mythe et de l'Histoire, puisque l'amphibolie des paysages littéraires (aux deux niveaux: celui du dynamisme qui épouse l'humanité avec la nature et celui du polymorphisme naturel comme tel) renvoie toujours à une morphogenèse antérieure – *status quo ante* pas au sens juridique, mais au sens phénoménologique et heideggérien de la contemplation comme *Andenken* – répétition et récréation singulière du mythique

⁴⁹ Le leitmotiv des "vertus industrielles" est très convaincante dans une description plastique de *Sens et Significance*: "Tout comme le temps évidé s'emplit de la monotonie des horloges et de moteurs, l'espace évidé s'emplit de motifs en damier, verticaux dans les façades des usines et des gratte-ciels, horizontaux dans le carroyage des campagnes et des villes, tel que le révèle la photographie aérienne. Ici l'on a broyé la cabane de Philémon, là le centre gothique d'une ville, au cas où l'incendie les aurait épargnés. Grues au long bec, excavatrices aux dents pointus dominant le tableau." (Ernst Jünger, *Sens et Significance*, Christian Bourgois, 1995, p. 48).

⁵⁰ Sur laquelle il n'y a pas ici de place pour des jugements moraux. Tout de même, l'argument de la "littérature pure" ne se soutient pas, puisque la mythosophie est innérente à l'ensemble de l'œuvre jüngerienne, de même que, si on ne va pas très loin, dans *Eumeswil* les *Hespérides* étaient intimement liées dans la communauté culturelle à *Pagos*, lui-même espace de l'entre-contre entre théologie, magie et morale.

à la marge du réel. D'où l'importance des milieux et des frontières⁵¹ au-delà du sens phénoménal. L'ouverture est un signe de l'imprévu et de la création humaine archétypale, où se rencontre l'abyssal et le zénithal dans la contemplation ekstatique (puisque toute contemplation est création et ré-création), elle n'est pas une blessure au sein de la nature animiste de Jünger. C'est pourquoi l'asymétrie (la géométrie concave des terres, naturelles ou urbaines) n'est pas du tout contradictoire, ni avec l'invariance verticale des cimes aigus⁵², ni avec le soleil "sacrosaint" ou avec la perdurance de l'eau maritime. Ainsi, la topologie se joint chez Jünger avec "l'imagogie" pour renvoyer nostalgiquement à une écologie mythosopique. L'effrayante "hiver sans fin" (au sens heideggerien) d'*Eumeswil* en est le revers – un espace faustique de l'univocité de la décision.

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⁵¹ Pour une analyse très dense des frontières et des seuils chez Jünger, v. François Poncet, "Le paysage maritime" in *Etudes Germaniques*, Oct.-Déc. 1996, p. 727-738.

⁵² Rassemblés par François Poncet à l'écume des vagues, les écueils (*Klippe*) seraient isomorphes aux volcans sous-marins, en renvoyant aux mythes cosmogoniques.

*** *Études Germaniques*, no. 4 (oct.-déc.), Paris, Didier Érudition, 1996.

*** *Images d'Ernst Jünger*, textes réunis par Danièle Bertrand-Vidal, Éditions Peter Lang, 1996.

*** *Ernst Jünger, Martin Heidegger. Correspondance 1949-1975*, Christian Bourgois, 2010.

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MERGING ART AND INSTALLATION: EXHIBITION INSTALLATION IN THE 20th CENTURY

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ABSTRACT. This paper discusses exhibition installation as an aesthetic medium. Drawing on Germano Celant's writing on installation, we advance an interpretation of artists' engagement with installation resulting in room-size works in the first half of the 20th century, as part of the evolution of exhibition installation towards the convergence of art and design. The paper also address the problem of intermediality as discussed by Juliane Rebentisch, and its implications for installation and attempts to tests Rosalind Krauss's reconception of the medium against Rebentisch's criticism, while analyzing Krauss's disapproval of installation art, including the room-size works of the avant-garde.

Keywords: *exhibition installation, installation art, aesthetic medium, intermediality.*

Introduction

This paper is a response to the lack of aesthetic study of the exhibition installation and posits exhibition installation as an aesthetic medium. In spite of the recurring convergence and overlapping of exhibition installation with installation art (and its prototypes) in the 20th century, exhibition installation¹ has generally been positioned at best as meaning making and at worst as contextualization, while installation art has taken on the full role of an aesthetic medium. Is it possible that the two have sufficiently in common, historically but also formally, in order to theorize exhibition installation as art? In order to explore the idea of exhibition installation

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¹ Throughout the paper, I will use the formulation "exhibition installation" and "art installation" interchangeably, as opposed to "installation art" used for the genre gaining prominence around the 1970s.

as medium we will study artists' engagement with installation in room-size works, focusing on the first half of the 20th century. Although intermediality is generally associated with the artistic movements of the fifties and sixties, this aspect can already be found in artists' experiments with design and art at the beginning of the century. Rosalind Krauss, in the context of a theorization of the aesthetic medium after modernism, expresses her strong disapproval of installation art, including the room-size works of the avant-garde. We will address the problem of the medium as theorized by Krauss and that of intermediality discussed by Juliane Rebentisch. We will consider Rebentisch's criticism of Krauss's reconception of the medium and attempt to clarify the grounds on which her assessment is built, as well as to analyze Krauss's dismissal of installation. The section, "Exhibition installation and installation art in the 20th century" addresses the status of the room-size works created after 1920. Art historian Julie Reiss refers to these works as proto-installations, as part of the genealogy of installation art, which goes through painting, assemblage, sculpture, and design. A different analysis of the same works is that of curator Germano Celant, who regards them as key points in the development of exhibition installation. As we will show below, Celant redirects or attention towards the merging of art and design.

Our second direction of analysis is that of the redefinition of the aesthetic medium and its implications for installation, broached in the section entitled "Hybridization, and the reconception of the aesthetic medium". We will show that Rebentisch's criticism of what she describes as Krauss's attempt to protect art from the hybridization characteristic to postmodern art, best illustrated by installation art, by linking the concept of art and its autonomy with a specialized engagement with a particular medium, is contradicted by Krauss's redefinition of the medium. We will, however, discover a separation that is intended to guarantee art's autonomy, which Rebentisch rightly identifies in Krauss's argument, that of art from life. On this ground, Krauss links autonomy to the medium and the white cube. Krauss's new approach of the aesthetic medium as a logical construction and her acknowledgement of the dissolution of the traditional genre boundaries shows that her rejection of installation is not caused by intermediality – defined by Rebentisch as the fusion of the different arts that transcend their boundaries and tends to undermine the classification into individual arts – nor the classifications intermediality undermines. We will argue that what Krauss rejects is the art forms that dispense with the white cube, for Krauss, a warrantor of the medium and of autonomy.

Exhibition installation as medium

One of the strongest critics of the lack acknowledgement in the art historical accounts of installation art is Mary Anne Staniszewski. This lack she describes as an “amnesia”² on the part of writers that present and analyze artworks individually, failing to give the due attention to the role of contextualization and representation played by the exhibitions in which those works were shown. In *The Power of Display*, Staniszewski shows that, with the appearance of artworks that used the format of installation art, exhibition installation enters the creative dimension of the works.³ In the hands of artists from the conceptual and institutional critique movement, the exhibition becomes a plurality of individual installations and the design of the exhibition installation, usually the responsibility of the museum, is integrated in the creative dimension of the works.⁴ During the development and display of artworks using the format of art installation, artists simultaneously appropriate the exhibition installation as conceptual dimension of their work. According to Staniszewski, with this shift, and the merging of artistic and curatorial practices, exhibition installation, which previously had been an instrument of museological contextualization, became part of the creative and conceptual dimension of curators.

Staniszewski, a significant writer for history of exhibition installation as art, presents installation design as “historical category, a medium in its own right”⁵, an argument for which she finds proof in the exhibitions organized between the 1929 and 1970 at the Museum of Modern art on New York. She attempts to correct the “failure to discuss artists’ installations in terms of installation design”⁶. The artists’ installations she refers to are those from the 1960s and 70s, the “inception of installation art”. She also analyzes the innovative exhibition designs created by the avant-garde designers, architects and artists, such as Herbert Bayer, Frederick Kiesler, Lilly Reich, and El Lissitzky in the first half of the century. The installations they created were an “important aspect – in some cases the most important aspect – of their work”⁷. Staniszewski sees these installations as a prehistory of installation art.⁸ She is one of the most prominent art historians discussing the relationship between installation art and exhibition installation, in a recent attempt from art historians and

² Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, The MIT Press, Massachusetts, Cambridge, 1998, „Introduction”, p. xviii.

³ See Staniszewski, *op. cit.*, especially the chapter “Installation Design and Installation Art”.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 276.

⁵ *Ibidem*, “Introduction”, p. xxii.

⁶ *Ibidem*. See the chapter “Installation Design and Installation Art”.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

curators to compensate for the absence of the exhibition installation in art history. Focusing on the design of exhibition galleries and on the types of experience offered by exhibition spaces throughout history, another art historian, Charlotte Klonk⁹ provides a rich historical study of the evolution of gallery interiors, which, together with research by Staniszewski and Celant on the evolution of art installation and installation art are the grounding of this study.

As we will show below, the fluidization of boundaries in artistic, curatorial and design practices was already happening in the 1920s. In this gradual, ongoing transformation during the 20th century, exhibition installation played a key role and we could argue, to use Bruce W. Ferguson's phrasing, that the installation was "*the medium*" as well as "*the medium*"¹⁰ through which it took place. In the anthology *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Ferguson, Greenberg and Nairne (eds.) „host" two apparently identical formulations which hide very different meaning. In the "Introduction" they write that "exhibitions have become *the medium* through which most art becomes known"¹¹, and in his essay "Exhibition Rethorics. Material speech and utter sense", published in the same volume, Ferguson refers to exhibitions as "*the medium* of contemporary art in the sense of being its main agency of communication"¹². Paul O'Neill makes clear this difference of emphasis and meaning in his book *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures*, and understands it as the difference between the exhibition as "specific cultural form" when the stress is on the definitive article, compared to the exhibition as "an agency of communication" when the stress is on the noun (*medium*).¹³ In other words, exhibition installation is instrument, as well as aesthetic medium.

Though their role in contextualization and representation has started to surface in art historical literature, arguments on what exhibition installation and exhibition are in aesthetic terms are underdeveloped. With few exceptions, they can be put under the umbrella of exhibition mediation, understood as placement in a certain scenario, the proximity to other works/objects, exhibition design (including the color of walls, typography, architecture) or the spectatorial mode it proposes. Moreover, the new discourse about the exhibition as medium is working with the

⁹ See Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2009.

¹⁰ Ferguson, Bruce W.; Greenberg, Reesa; Nairne Sandy (eds.), *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996, p.1; p. 127.

¹¹ Ferguson, Bruce W.; Greenberg, Reesa; Nairne Sandy (eds.), *op. cit.*, "Introduction", p.1.

¹² Bruce Ferguson, "Exhibition Rethorics. Material speech and utter sense", in Ferguson, Bruce W.; Greenberg, Reesa; Nairne Sandy (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 127.

¹³ Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures*, The MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusets, 2012, p. 90.

assumption that the exhibition is a medium as mere extension of installation art. An eloquent example of this assumption is the discussion between Matthias Michalka and Juliane Rebentisch, published in the catalog accompanying an exhibition dedicated to art practices of the 1990s and to the way in which these practices worked with, explored and expanded the exhibition.¹⁴ Michalka's question for Rebentisch, if artistic work with the medium of the exhibition can be understood as an extended form of installation in which artists incorporate aspects of selection and display in their work¹⁵, suggests Michalka's understanding of the exhibition medium as an extended installation. In this view, self-reflective exhibitions are works of installation art expanded to include the curatorial attributes of selecting, display and communication in the creator's work. While Michalka is right to see the integration of a curatorial dimension in the work of artists active in the 1990s, he limits the sense of the exhibition as medium to an extension of installation art. There are two points in this logic that can be contested, drawing on Rebentisch's position on the matter.

Rebentisch posits that "installation art is essentially exhibition" and that installations reflecting directly on the act of exhibiting (many of them associated with institutional critique) are not extended installations but simply installations.¹⁶ Her argument is based on the idea that installation does not need to expand in order to reflect upon the exhibiting spaces or conventions, because this reflection is already implicit in the modality of formal opening of installation towards its location.¹⁷ On one hand, installation art can approach a variety of problems, of which the exhibitionary conditions is only one option. On the other hand, installation art is not the only form through which the exhibition space can be thematized. Installation art is exhibition, maintains Rebentisch, not because all art installations address curatorial themes but because the open form of installation brings attention to the fact that context influences art.¹⁸

In other words, and this is the first point of contestation, there is no need to think of installations as expanding towards the exhibition, because the formal openness to the context of exhibiting is already implicit in installation art. The second point is that self-reflexivity is a possible, but not necessary aspect of installation

¹⁴ Juliane Rebentisch, and Matthias Michalka, "To install", in Armaly Fareed, *To Expose, to Show, to Demonstrate, to Inform, to Offer: Artistic Practices Around 1990...*, catalogue accompanying the exhibition with the same name, Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna, 2015, pp. 223-4.

¹⁵ Matthias Michalka, "To install", in Armaly Fareed, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

¹⁶ J. Rebentisch, *Ibidem*, p. 223.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 223-4.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

as exhibition.¹⁹ The discussion about exhibitions as mediums can be encountered more frequently when the respective exhibitions address the topic of exhibiting, in other words, when they are self-reflective, and less so when exhibitions address different topics. It is, of course, a starting point for such a discussion.²⁰ On one hand, Rebentisch could be alerting us to the danger of a false premise – that self-reflectivity is a necessary aspect of exhibitions-as-mediums – and of granting the status of medium based on theme. On the other, Rebentisch's conception of self-reflectivity is developed also with regard to Rosalind Krauss's reconception of the aesthetic medium and to the invention of mediums by artists such as Ed Ruscha, James Coleman or Bruce Nauman. As we will attempt to show in the third section of this paper, Rebentisch regards what Krauss calls invention of mediums as reflection of the specificity of the mediums engaged.

Rebentisch is aware that all art has been sensitive to the context of its presentation. From the Renaissance paintings in cathedrals, to Claude Monet's *Water Lilies* arranged in the Orangerie in 1927, art has been site-specific²¹ before the term site-specificity was invented. But installation art, Rebentisch argues, differs due to the fact that it precisely reflects on this aspect, playing with the logic of the *parergon*, the "frame", the accessory, the dynamic limit of the work, which is more and more porous, to the point of complete convergence.²² This is particularly resonant for the exhibition installation, the "frame" of all exhibited works, which starts reflecting on its role as accessory and transgresses it.

Exhibition installation and installation art in the 20th century

Germano Celant²³ regards the same type of installation works of the 20th century described by Julie Reiss²⁴, not as a genealogy of installation art, searching for proto-installations, but as a study of the development of exhibition installation.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ Another possible line in the discussion regarding the exhibition as medium, one which I do not take up in this study, could be developed on the basis of roles (artist/ curator/ artist-curator/ curator-artist).

²¹ I owe this kind reminder to my academic adviser, prof. dr. Dan Eugen Rațiu.

²² J. Rebentisch, *Ibidem*.

²³ See Germano Celant, "A Visual Machine. Art Installation and its modern archetypes", in Ferguson, Bruce W.; Greenberg, Reesa; Nairne Sandy (eds.): *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Routledge, London, 1996.

²⁴ See Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: the Spaces of Installation Art*, MIT Press, Cambridge; London, 1999.

In his view, installation lies somewhere between architecture and art.²⁵ Along with providing the role of mediation for „an organization of spaces and an arrangement of visual materials”, it is also, Celant says, “a crucial component of any exhibition”, “in and of itself a form of modern work”.²⁶

Celant shows how installation got there by gradually abandoning its decorative, illustrative, and ornamental role. From being „an ornamental and illustrative process”, „a material support and a background for an object to be seen and sold,”²⁷ it became an exhibitionary technique that put emphasis on the relationships between the works, and which slowly changed the accumulative style of arranging works from ceiling to floor, with a linear articulation comprising fewer objects and more space “breathing” between them. This affected the distancing of art objects and an altogether enhanced attention to the installation; relationships, deliberately sought, are associative and auxiliary to the art objects, creating sequences and rhythms through an “expository phraseology” in an organized and differentiated totality.²⁸

Celant describes how this new method “ignored” the upper and lower part of the walls, using only the middle band, which the Futurists change again, not to establish the old salon’s ideal unity, but to reach an artistic totality in which the motifs do not differentiate themselves. The 20th century Italian Futurists had in mind a synesthetic merging of all the elements into an environment, the walls transforming from support for paintings, into pictorial surface as well, and soon after, Russian Suprematism and Futurism explore the convergence of installation and art into organic whole, an art object and a pure environment.²⁹ Celant proposes a different approach after the middle of the 20th century, when Constructivist, Bauhaus and Surrealist approaches will distance themselves from the wall, for a type of agglomerated arrangement that loved to suspend and rotate of works, engaging all senses in a rather theatrical scenery, and showing a spherical perception of the exhibition space.³⁰

Balla’s Futurist paintings from 1918 and 1923 bring the walls and the paintings together in a synesthesia, transforming the walls from background framing painting, into painting, and merge all the elements of the exhibition, from the painting, the walls, and the furniture in a total environment. Celant best exemplifies the change in the role of the wall with Balla’s Futurist paintings which lose individual importance,

²⁵ G. Celant, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-6.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 261.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 260-2.

²⁸ *Ibidem*. The organization was done according to periods, themes, characteristic sequences in an artists’ body of work.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 266.

as they become elements of an „installation of artistic totality where differentiation of artistic motives is no longer permitted”³¹. He sees here a liberation of the painting from the frame into the exhibition space, creating an „environment which reflects the art and vice-versa”, imbued with a sense of floating of the equal visual elements in a visual continuity³². In the exhibitions held between 1915 and 1919, the Russian Futurists arrange their works either very low, or very high on the wall, or in the corner (Malevich, 1915).³³

In 1921, before El Lissitzky and Kiesler’s room-size works, Ivan Pruni scatters his works all over the interior of Sturm Gallery in Berlin. What is taking place is a transition from individual artwork to environment, which Celant links to visual-sound experiments by poets like Klebnikov and to those in the Italian and Russian Futurist circles.³⁴ Very soon after, at the Grand Exposition of 1923, in Berlin, El Lissitzky and Kandinsky exhibit environmental situations. There is an “artistically intelligible organic unity” in the exhibitions designed by Lissitzky, provided by establishing “a link among all his visual and plastic elements”, leading to the *Proun Room* of 1923, which takes “the convergence of the visual machines of art and installation to its logical conclusion”.³⁵

Both influenced by Einstein’s theory of relativity, El Lissitzky and Malevich use white for experimenting with the exhibition space. In her *History of Gallery Interiors*, Charlotte Klonk³⁶ indicates color as one of the important aspects for mediation and experience. If for Malevich white represents the infinite space, for Lissitzky it is a symbol of dynamic space. The latter’s *Abstract Cabinet* [Kabinett der Abstrakten] at Provinzialmuseum Hanover, 1928, will accentuate the dynamic movement through the design of the room, created to host constructivist and abstract painting fixed on “spacial walls”.³⁷ It is an environment acting like a “dynamic *frame*”³⁸ for paintings, in which the viewers are guided through by the chromatic variations of the walls, a space intended to inspire collective experience.³⁹

Looking again at Lissitzky’s *Proun Room*, a rendering in tridimensional space of a painting in a room, and at his *Abstract Cabinet*, at once installation for paintings and artwork, the merging of exhibition installation and art in the work of a single

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 265.

³⁶ C. Klonk, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-21.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 116-7.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 265.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 116.

artist become visible as soon as the 1920s. What results is commonly called proto-installation and put on a pathway to installation proper.

But Celant shows us a different lens through which to look at the same events and tendencies in the art of the 20th century. He describes the *Proun Room* as the “ultimate art installation object”, “the first example of *pure environmental art* or *art installation*”, stressing that there is no trace of interior design and that the paintings enter the installation and create a unified piece.⁴⁰ A couple of decades later, in 1954, Frederick Kiesler exhibits at Sidney Janis Gallery in New York pictorial elements related thematically, installed on the wall, the ceiling and the floor of the exhibition room. Twelve years before, he had famously designed Peggy Guggenheim’s *Art of This Century Gallery*, with its *Surrealist Gallery* in which works were installed not on its concave walls, but throughout the rooms. The adjustable support systems were to be moved at different angles and heights, the whole design making it seem as if the works were floating. If the work done by Kiesler for *Art of this Century* was an exhibition installation created to show the works of other artists, the *Horse Galaxy* from 1954 was his own artistic project, a pictorial group showing a horse from different angles and surrounding the viewer from all directions.⁴¹ We find this type of arrangement also as the work of a curator, Arnold Bode.

In 1964, during the third edition of Documenta, Bode, who played a key role in the creation of the famous exhibition, installs the three paintings of Ernst Wilhelm Nay on the ceiling of a long corridor-like room. The arrangement of Nay’s works as “ceiling paintings” in an oblique angle and rhythmic manner offered the room a quasi-religious aura.⁴² The “wall paintings” mounted so in spite of the artists’ intention, according to Charlotte Klonk⁴³, is just one on Bode’s unconventional installations. As part of the same section, named tellingly *Sculpture and Painting in Space*, the German curator hangs Sam Francis’ works, *Three Paintings for the Staircase at Kunsthalle Basel* (1956-57) on an elevated hexagonal wall construction. Closest to environments is considered the installation of Emilio Vedova’s paintings at different angles, in a room painted in black.⁴⁴

El Lissitzky’s and Kiesler’s room-sized works, both artists as well as designers, are similar formally and thematically to the rooms arranged by curator Arnold Bode. There is not only a convergence of arts, but also of practices. In the design created

⁴⁰ G. Celant, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

⁴¹ J. Reiss, *op. cit.*, p. xx.

⁴² https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_iii.

⁴³ C. Klonk, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

⁴⁴ https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_iii.

by Kiesler for the gallery *Art of this Century*, Celant sees a theatrical component: the supporting walls could be moved, the furniture was multifunctional, and the walls covered with canvas were mirroring the furniture design with their curved surfaces.⁴⁵ It is another instance of the various viewpoints in a room, after Lissitzky, and a step further in the merging of art and installation in a room-size work.⁴⁶ At the same time, his design for Peggy Guggenheim's gallery points for Celant the tendency of moving the artworks away from the wall and installing them on supports to be seen from all sides, in a space characterized by a "spherical perception".⁴⁷ He sees this development as enabled first by the "suspended and rotating forms of Constructivism" and by the functional design of Bauhaus: Gropius' and Schmit's designs from 1934, and also Bayer's designs for expositions in the 1920s and 1930s will "exclude a priori" the limitations of the wall and suggest a supremacy of visual concept over object.⁴⁸

Against the freed wall the Surrealists will have a strong reaction. Their exhibitions (1938-1947) were filled with objects meant to awaken all possible senses, not giving a moment's rest or allowing for passivity, like a "voyage through the viscera of the unconscious rather than a walk through the void"⁴⁹. Duchamp's installation of 1200 coal sacks at the *International Exposition du Surrealisme* at Beaux-Arts Gallery, Paris, in 1938, was the strongest moment of the "Surrealist embrace", to use Celant's words, which intensified as the visitor progressed in the space. Duchamp played the role of both artist and curator in this show, contextualizing the objects within the unifying environment of the exhibition. The show comprised oneiric installations that evoked the imagery and the emotional tone of the works and reflects on the exhibition space, addressing the role of context on the content, and the way in which context becomes content, thematizing the exhibition environment. Moreover, the installations conceived by Duchamp show a close bond between the content of the works, the theme of the exhibition, and its form. Four years later, Duchamp creates *One Mile of String*, the installation of the 1942 exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism*, which anticipates the environments built by Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg and his contemporaries.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ G. Celant, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-8.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 266.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 267.

⁵⁰ J. Reiss, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Kaprow' environments were named so by the artist and were room-scale or room-size works that took over the entire room.⁵¹ As shown in an article published in 1958⁵², he identifies the roots of environments in action painting. His theory regarding environments is that artists arrive at tridimensional spaces or environments progressively, from action painting and through assemblages. Kaprow writes about the way in which Pollock was inside his painting, about the sensation that his paintings are endless, stepping out into the room. In Kaprow's view, Pollock's practice is a sort of ritual whose material happens to be painting. In her history of Installation Art, Reiss⁵³ notices how Kaprow positions his art next to Pollock's, theoretically but also visually, by juxtaposing a photograph of Pollock in his studio to one of his own environments. In fact, Kaprow came up with the idea of assemblages by watching Pollock paint on glass and placing different objects on it.⁵⁴

Alongside the particular inspiration taken from Pollock's action painting, in Robert Motherwell's 1951 book *The Dada Painters and Poets*, Kaprow specifies that Dada, Italian Futurism and Russian constructivism have had a significant influence upon his work, as well as finding prototypes of environments in art history. Of these, we already discussed 1928 *Abstract Cabinet*, a room created with the purpose of showing expressionistic works, which becomes an artwork per se. In 1923, the Russian constructivist had already transferred his pictorial idea into the tridimensional space creating the *Proun Room*. But, as Julie Reiss observes in her study⁵⁵, Motherwell's book also contains an essay by Schwitters in which the German artist writes about his interest in creating a complete work of art, an idea he experiments with in *Merzbau*, a room-size work that was, perhaps, even more inspiring for the later installation artists than the *Abstract Cabinet*.

In spite of the contrast between minimalist works (clean, minimalist, part of a controlled situation) and environments (built in line with an aesthetics of improvisation, of spontaneity and of debris), in terms of both the aspect and component, these very different works overlap when it comes to the relationship public-work-space and to temporality. Moreover, as Reiss shows by following the history of their exhibitions, the artists of the two approaches also meet collaboratively in common exhibition

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. xi.

⁵² See Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" in Alan Kaprow (author), Jeff Kelly (ed.), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, University of California Press, London, 1993, pp. 4-6.

⁵³ J. Reiss, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ Hans Namuth captures Pollock painting on glass in his video *Jackson Pollock 51*. I owe this informative detail to art critic Joseph Melyi.

⁵⁵ See J. Reiss, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

spaces such as Judson Gallery.⁵⁶ But what they all share and Reiss considers to be most significant is the shift from exhibiting individual, autonomous works of art, to the inclusion of the space or the site conceptual parameter of the work.⁵⁷

Hybridization, and the reconception of the aesthetic medium

The 1960's and 1970's bring to the spotlight a transformation of the concept of art that, as seen, was already acting within the art world before the middle of the century. Intermediality is the new status quo, one that Reibentisch⁵⁸ believes art criticism is not ready to accept. It is the home of installation art, one of the most conceptually challenging art genres winning ground in that time. With its hybridization and transgressing of boundaries, Reibentisch argues in her *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, it threatens an idea about art in which aesthetic autonomy is dependent on specific mediums.⁵⁹

Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, both modernist critics, have written extensively about the necessity of medium specificity for aesthetic autonomy. Rosalind Krauss, a postmodernist, has instead a more ambivalent position. Her books and essays offer two main and seemingly contradictory positions towards the transgression of traditional art categories. She acknowledges the new characteristics of the art production since the 1970s and proposes a different understanding of the medium, which is no longer defined on the grounds of a material, but as a certain set of rules or operations with cultural terms. This is the "post-medium condition" theorized by Krauss in her early essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1979/1998) and discussed also in later publications such as *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (2000) and *Under Blue Cup* (2011).

Her 2011 book is considered a return to the medium. But already in 1997, she talks about the invention of new mediums. Her "knights of the medium" presented in *Under Blue Cup* are rescuing arts' autonomy from the kitsch of intermedial condition best exemplified by installation art, with the same strategy proposed in 1979, meaning the invention of new mediums. In the following part of this paper, we will discuss Krauss's idea of artists inventing mediums and her overall position towards the aesthetic medium. We will also consider Reibentisch's criticism of Krauss and attempt to clarify the grounds on which her assessment is built.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 63-64.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

⁵⁸ J. Reibentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2012, see the chapter „Intermediality“.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

As Dan Eugen Rațiu points out⁶⁰, by acknowledging the transgression of the traditional categories or genre boundaries by contemporary artists associated with the movements of 1960-70s, such as installation, minimalism, conceptualism, performance etc., Krauss relativizes the status of aesthetic categories previously considered as universal (such as painting and sculpture). In his analysis of Krauss's position, Rațiu shows that she is only partly against Greenberg: she acknowledges, like Greenberg, that there is an internal logic and rules of painting and sculpture, but considers them as relative and limited historically. Rațiu analyzes the texts in which Krauss discusses this issue, such as the essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1979): against Greenberg's thesis – that each modern art purified itself progressively according to the logic and requirements of its specific medium – Krauss describes the characteristics of the postmodern artistic production in America, where everyday objects, debris, natural materials etc. are integrated into the works of contemporary artists, and shows that Greenberg, instead of changing his critical discourse in order to account for the new phenomena in the artistic practice, only manages to manipulate traditional categories like "painting" and "sculpture", until almost anything can fit in.

Krauss's "conceptual expansion"⁶¹, as Rațiu calls her endeavor, entails that in postmodernism, artistic practice does not need to be defined in relation to a given, universal or privileged medium (such as "sculpture"), "but rather in relation to certain logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium – photography, books, lines on walls, mirrors, or sculpture itself – might be used".⁶² As Rațiu summarizes, Krauss thinks of individual artistic practice and of the problem of medium in the terms of a structural strategy and not on the grounds of the material or in the linear and essentialist terms of modernism.⁶³

Krauss's idea of the medium distanced from materiality appears not only in "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", but also in later publications, such as *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (2000) and in *Under Blue Cup* (2011). In this later book, the aesthetic value and autonomy seems to have been lost during the "post-medium condition" and needs to be saved by the "knights of the medium", a term borrowed from Russian formalist Viktor Schlovsky (*Knight's Move*)⁶⁴. Against the practices of the "post-medium condition" (installation, conceptual

⁶⁰ See Dan Eugen Rațiu, *Disputa modernism – postmodernism. O introduce în teoriile contemporane asupra artei*, Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2012, pp. 246-51.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 250.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ Rațiu, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-52. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, The New York Press, New York, 1998, pp.35, 45-46.

⁶⁴ R. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2011, p. 102.

art, relational aesthetics), which are demanding the end of the white cube and of the medium, her knights are looking for new “technical supports” in order to extend the life of the medium. She proposes that the medium is defined now as paradigm based on the terms memory and forgetting, a binary that can describe the artistic practices expanding sculpture into installation and conceptual art.⁶⁵ Krauss notes that this distancing from materiality to abstract relations is similar to Stanley Cavell’s move, who described the medium as “automatism”, made of rules and logic and argues for a necessity of rules in a time when artists have broken with tradition and “anything goes”.⁶⁶

Krauss insists on a principle of self-differing of the aesthetic medium, and, already in an early essay published in the magazine *October* in 1997⁶⁷, but also later, in *Under Blue Cup*, on invention of mediums. Rebentisch sees the self-difference principle as Krauss’s solution to the problem of redefining Greenbergian “proper area of competence”, or “medium specificity” since they are no longer to be found in the material qualities of the respective means of representation.⁶⁸ Juliane Rebentisch equates Krauss’s solution – the principle of self-differing “never simply collapsed into the physicality of their support”⁶⁹ – with Niklas Luhmann’s distinction between medium and form.⁷⁰

An interesting argument made by Luhmann in his *Art as a Social System*⁷¹, which Rebentisch discusses, is that the medium can never be seen in itself, but only in the form, and that forms cannot express the essence of the medium, not even when the medium appears as form in the artwork. A useful example she gives that of Jackson Pollock’s painting, where paint and the canvas (the medium) appear as forms. Rebentisch goes on to argue that in the case of all art, the material from which the work is made of shows up in the work, but Pollock’s painting reflects precisely on this transition between medium and the contingency of form creation. These, continues Rebentisch, are not making visible the essence of the medium but address its potentiality; in Luhmann’s words, “leaving room for multiple combinations”⁷². She argues that not only is the idea that modern painting expresses the flatness of its own medium problematic due

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 17-19.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

⁶⁷ Rosalind Krauss, “...And Then Turn Away?” An Essay on James Coleman, *October*, vol. 81 (summer, 1997).

⁶⁸ J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics...*, p. 81.

⁶⁹ R. Krauss, *A Voyage on The North Sea. Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2000, p. 53.

⁷⁰ J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics...*, pp. 81-7.

⁷¹ It is Niklas Luhmann’s chapter “Medium and Form”, in N. Luhmann, *Art as A Social System*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2000, apud. J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics...*

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 82.

to its medium positivism, but even more so because it tends to collapse the distinction between medium and form, as Luhmann warns, with absurd restrictions for the possibilities of painting⁷³.

Moreover, for Rebentisch, Greenberg's tendency to identify medium with form leads to a conceptual failure to appreciate the implicit theoretical provocation of such paintings as Ad Reinhardt's black monochromes, whose subject is precisely an approximate convergence of medium and form. One reason for putting forward Luhmann's distinction between medium and form is because Rebentisch believes it "might also serve to more precisely formulate Krauss's valid objection to Greenberg's positivism."⁷⁴ Rebentisch regards Krauss's response to Greenberg as "the restitution of the guiding art theoretical difference between medium and form."⁷⁵

A second reason is that Rebentisch adheres to Luhmann's definition of the medium as the unified "medium of art", one that transgresses the boundaries of individual arts, and in which the dynamic between medium and form plays an important part.⁷⁶

For Luhmann, there are two sides in all forms, that which is fixed in the work and the unmarked space of possibility for other forms, and that any making of a form starts with a first step, the decision that separates the unmarked space of aesthetic form, from the possibility of other forms and it is the gesture that generates the difference between form and medium.⁷⁷ To illustrate Luhmann's idea, Rebentisch chooses as examples the first brushstroke on a canvas and the first mark of an installation.⁷⁸ According to Luhmann, Rebentisch summarizes, "the aesthetic form is distinguished from other forms by the fact that we reflect on it against the backdrop of an unmarked space that makes it possible while at the same time undermining it."⁷⁹ Luhmann's unmarked space refers to "the other side" of the form: "the unmarked space is the indispensable other side, a reference to the possibilities that, for their part, point to an infinity that cannot be contained in one place."⁸⁰ The question that arises is if this "unmarked open space of the possibilities of other forms" is not precisely the "loose coupling of elements" leaving "room for multiple combinations" which Luhmann names "medium".⁸¹

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ J. Rebentisch, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-3.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

⁷⁶ N. Luhmann, *op. cit.*, p. 118, apud. J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics...*, p. 87.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁸ J. Rebentisch, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-7.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

⁸⁰ N. Luhmann, *op. cit.*, p. 117, apud. J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics...*, p. 86.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 104, apud. J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics...*, p. 81.

The discussion revolves around the concept of the medium. Rebenitsch redefines the medium by drawing on Luhmann, offering, at the same time, a positive answer to our question: “the term “medium” here, and this is the decisive reconception, no longer denotes the endless possibilities of the means of representation in question. Medium is now the potentially infinite and open horizon of possible formations of interrelation given with each individual work of art itself.”⁸² Rebenitsch’s analysis of Luhmann’s dynamic between medium and form leads her to a concept of the aesthetic “that transcends the various particular qualities of artistic means of representation” and also to “a different concept of aesthetic autonomy”.⁸³ This reconception of aesthetic autonomy, she writes, “in a theory of experience is not tied to an identification of somehow specifically aesthetic areas of competence” but, and this is the focus of her argument, “art is autonomous rather, in and by virtue of the specific structure of the experience that corresponds to it.”⁸⁴

Going back to Krauss, Rațiu is right to stress the change in Krauss’s position and to see it as a “return of the same”, in nietzschean terms, but it is not a surprising return since Krauss had not in the first place left as far as it seemed. Although both Fried and Krauss criticize Greenberg’s medium positivism, they remain faithful to his idea that aesthetic autonomy can exist only if art defines its area of competence. Whereas Fried argues that an area of competence/autonomy can exist only within the boundaries of the individual arts, boundaries which can expand or renew, but not be disrupted by intermediality, according to Rebenitsch, Krauss acknowledges the dissolution of boundaries between arts, but still remains faithful to Greenberg’s theory by rearticulating the idea that autonomy can exist only when there is a medium specificity.⁸⁵ But how does Krauss conceive *medium specificity*? Is it, as it is for Greenberg, “tied to a physical substance”⁸⁶? Or does she think of the medium, as Rațiu sees it, “in the terms of a structural strategy and not on the grounds of the material or in the linear and essentialist terms of modernism.”⁸⁷

In *Under Blue Cup*, Krauss redefines the medium by “substituting ‘technical support’ for the traditional idea of a physical medium”⁸⁸. It is the material support – “oil on canvas, tempera on wooden panel, pigment on wet plaster – the materials of the

⁸² Rebenitsch, *Aesthetics...*, p. 90.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

⁸⁶ R. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, p. 7.

⁸⁷ D. E. Rațiu, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-52.

⁸⁸ R. Krauss, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

guilds” which Krauss is distancing the medium from in order to reconceiving it as “a logic, rather than a form of matter”.⁸⁹ Krauss redefines the medium as a paradigm:

Since the paradigm is a logical support, it can substitute itself for a physical substance in founding the rules of the medium. Constituting a unified field, the medium’s paradigm might be considered the foundation of all the possible variations open to a physical substance – pigment supported in turn by canvas, wooden panel, leaded glass, or plastered wall. Later in this argument I will explore the paradigm of /medium/ itself, as a binary of memory versus forgetting.⁹⁰

In her use of the paradigm, Krauss draws on structural linguistics, a discipline that “discovers meaning as the sum of two opposing terms, which it calls binaries and Roland Barthes renames ‘paradigm.’”⁹¹ Krauss establishes the paradigm of the “/medium/” as “memory versus forgetting.”⁹² Memory is here “the power of the medium to hold the efforts of the forebears of a specific genre in reserve for the present”, while forgetting is “the antagonist of memory.” This forgetting is encouraged by three things that, during the end of the 1970, “the time of the postmodernist crisis”, lead to the disposal of the “specific medium.”⁹³ The three things Krauss refers to are post minimalism, conceptual art, and Duchamp’s readymade.⁹⁴

The mediums Krauss finds in contemporary art practice are those invented by artist who “discover the conventions of a new technical support.”⁹⁵ Krauss discusses the idea of the possibility of artists inventing mediums in the catalog essay “...And Then Turn Away? An Essay on James Coleman”, published in 1997, and in her latest book, *Under Blue Cup*, published in 2011. In the later publication, she explores the work of eight artists who she believes successfully invent mediums: Ed Ruscha, William Kentridge, James Coleman (Coleman’s work is exemplified in this line already in the 1997 essay), Christian Marclay, Bruce Nauman, Sophie Calle, Marcel Broodthaers and Harun Faroki.

For Krauss, artists don’t extend or reinterpret the respective medium, but “invent” new mediums.⁹⁶ She sets the term “invention” between quotation marks, acknowledging that artists don’t really invent mediums, that carving, painting and

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 16-7.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 128.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

⁹⁶ R. Krauss, “...And Then Turn Away?”, pp. 5-6.

drawing already existed at the time where the first group of people call themselves artists.⁹⁷ The artists' move, according to her, is that they individualizes their practice within specific mediums, develop skills and histories against which innovation can be measured. By the end of the 20th century, Krauss thinks, art is already in the post-medium condition either by fault of Duchamp or photography, which populates our lives with media, meaning technologically rendered images leaving medium aesthetics obsolete. The invention of other mediums, and the return to painting in its state prior to the monochrome are the two reactions to this situation seen by Krauss.⁹⁸

Rebentisch questions Krauss's idea of the invention of mediums and believes that what Krauss is in fact describing with examples such as James Coleman's slide series is an "invention" of genres.⁹⁹ In her use of the term "genre", Rebentisch refers to "the genres of art in general, that is, to the distinction between the various arts, and not to the poetic or artistic generic distinctions within the individual arts,"¹⁰⁰ whereas with the term "medium" she refers "generally to the representational means of the various arts."¹⁰¹ In attempting to clarify Rebentisch's definition of the genre, we will shortly go back to the discussion regarding the Luhmann's distinction between medium and form. In this context, Rebentisch points out that painting (as opposed to canvas and paint), for example is precisely not a medium but a way of creating form.¹⁰² Therefore, the medium is for Rebentisch the support, "the canvas and paint" and the "representational means" of the arts, whereas "painting" is one of the various arts, a genre. Rebentisch believes that:

What Krauss is obviously taking aim at by speaking of inventing a medium" is the invention not so much of new *media* but of new artistic *genres*. In the most advanced art practice of today, the invention of new genres has indeed replaced the production of works within preconceived genre boundaries. But I think it is characteristic of these new works of art, which simultaneously constitute new genres, that their means of representation are explicit about and even exhibit the fact that they precisely do not constitute a distinct domain separate from other arts or from the extra aesthetic.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁹⁹ Rebentisch, *op. cit.*, pp. 85; 94-5.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 82.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 85.

At one point in the text of *Under Blue Cup*, Krauss does indeed refer to the invention of genres. She reflects on the way in which “the various artistic supports, each represented by its individual muse, serve as the scaffolding for a “who you are’ in the collective memory of the practitioners of that particular genre – painting, sculpture, photography, film.”¹⁰⁴ Her intent is that her book speak not only to the “who you are” of each muse, but also “to ‘the who you are’ of what I will show are the new genres that contemporary artists – during what I am calling the ‘post-medium’ condition – feel an imperative to “invent”.¹⁰⁵ Krauss’s use of the idea of the invention of genre in the context of the invention of mediums is not explained. However, as we will show below, Krauss’s definition of technical support neutralizes the genres.

According to Rebentisch, when Krauss posits the idea that, faced with a situation in which the traditional mediums have been exhausted, artists invent new mediums, she shifts the discussion “to the level of individual works of art”. Moreover, Rebentisch argues, “according to Krauss, the possibility of aesthetic autonomy today is tied to the question of whether individual artists can succeed in ‘inventing’ a specific aesthetic medium in relation to their individual artistic production.”¹⁰⁶ Developing her argument in *Under Blue Cup*, Krauss selects eight artists that she believes successfully invent mediums, but their invention is not judged (only) in relation to their individual artistic production, but, as is the case for Ed Ruscha (one of the eight artists), also in relation to the tradition of “the medium he is both abandoning and reinventing”. What Ruscha uses as technical support for his *Stains* is “iodine, chocolate syrup, chutney” and “cloth-bound book covers like taffeta, or the photography of the book’s contents”, instead of the traditional oil on canvas.¹⁰⁷ Krauss writes:

Ruscha’s stains travel back down the history of recent painting to the 1960s and the advent of stain painting, also called color field: chroma poured onto raw canvas to leave a lurid stain. In doing so, they function as the “memory” of the medium he is both abandoning and reinventing.¹⁰⁸

Going back to Rebentisch’s criticism of Krauss’s idea of the invention of mediums, she observes that when Coleman uses the tape, and Jeff Wall the light boxes,

¹⁰⁴ R. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ J. Rebentisch, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁷ R. Krauss, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-78.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

neither “strictly speaking invented their media”.¹⁰⁹ Krauss’s idea can be interpreted as a “discovery as aesthetic mediums” of something existent in the domain of life-culture. As Rebentisch writes, “Coleman merely discovered the slide series, and Wall the light box, as an aesthetic medium.”¹¹⁰ These, Rebentisch points out, are already known in the advertising industry. According to her, their use by Coleman and Wall is a reflective engagement with mediums familiar outside the aesthetic realm, and does not establish them as mediums, but as genres.¹¹¹

But for Krauss, Coleman’s appropriation of the slide tape, taken from the advertising industry and its use *as* medium, is not merely a discovery, in the nonaesthetic sphere, of a material support. Rather, the medium consists of his use of such a technical support, “as set of rules”.¹¹² One of Coleman’s rules is the “double face-out”, a technique taken from photo novels, comic books and advertising, which works “as reminder of the screen’s physical surface as the underlying principle from which the rule derives”.¹¹³ Similarly, *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* Ruscha creates a recursive structure: “Ruscha’s interest in the idea of medium as a type of support also takes shape as a set of rules.”¹¹⁴ Krauss writes: “with his gasoline stations, Ruscha’s medium has less to do with the physicality of the support than with a system of rules.”¹¹⁵ Indeed, for Krauss, the artists who are inventing new mediums are those who “discover the conventions of a new technical support.”¹¹⁶ Both Ruscha and Coleman take their supports from the culture industry.

Coleman’s slide tapes, Rebentisch notes, are in between film and photography. This “in between” of the slide tapes is a merging of two accepted mediums, film and photography, which implies a transgression of medium boundaries that Krauss does not reject. Rebentisch sees this coalescence as intermediality and argues that “as Krauss’s essay also indicates, aesthetic autonomy seems to be constituted, in and through the specificity of the experience that Coleman’s works provoke precisely by virtue of their intermediality.”¹¹⁷ Intermediality, as defined by Rebentisch, is a term established in the 1960s to describe artistic practices that could not be classified by using the traditional categories of art.¹¹⁸ According to Rebentisch, in intermediality

¹⁰⁹ Rebentisch, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 95.

¹¹² R. Krauss, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

¹¹⁷ Rebentisch, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 75-6.

there is a fusion, a merging of the different arts, and this is a tendency that undermines both the conventional classification of art in different arts, and an idea about art dependent on the tradition of individual arts. Rebentisch also points out that, for its critics, intermediality entails a hybridization of art, and, more essentially, the decline of taste and an end of artistic autonomy caused by the transgression of boundaries between genres. Rebentisch identifies the idea that unites diverse positions such as Greenberg's, then those of Fried and Krauss, and also Adorno. This idea, which she believes is not only conceptually flawed, but also art historically untrue, is: the specialized engagement with a specific medium informed by the tradition of the respective art is indispensable to the production of autonomous art. This is the logic which the three critics try to protect, Rebentisch argues, and which the art practices appearing in the 1960s and 1970s threaten with their new truth, intermediality.

As the individual work integrates more and more mediums, and as specific artistic abilities are no longer necessary, we face a concept of art illustrated by what Rebentisch calls "the Duchampian provocation", one that is "*not at all* tied to specific mediums".¹¹⁹ This situation in which apparently anything can be called art is a problem that art criticism still struggles with, proved, for Rebentisch, by the way in which critics such as Krauss link the concept of art with that of an engagement with an aesthetic medium.¹²⁰ Krauss discusses Duchamp, amongst other occasions, in the context of the three things that led to the disposal of the aesthetic medium. Conceptual artists saw Duchamp's installation of the objects in the museum as ready-mades, as "the naked definition of the objects' aesthetic status and made Duchamp its god."¹²¹ She writes: "as art became 'idea', the medium vanished."¹²² With the contribution of the three things – post minimalism, Duchamp and Conceptual art - art stepped into what Krauss calls "the post-medium condition", and to these three things artists react in the 1970s, and begin inventing new mediums.¹²³ However, for Krauss, neither the post-medium condition, nor, as we have seen, the invention of mediums is tied to the traditional idea of the specific medium.

Krauss's medium does not echo Greenberg's unique proper area of competence of each individual medium. Moreover, when Krauss links the concept of art to an engagement of the aesthetic medium, her reconceptualization of the medium as logical support (and not a material one) changes the terms of the discussion. Unlike Greenberg, Krauss does not reject the transgression of medium or genre boundaries.

¹¹⁹ Rebentisch, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

¹²¹ R. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, p. 20.

¹²² *Ibidem*.

¹²³ *Ibidem*.

She acknowledges the exhaustion that artists felt in the 1970s with the traditional mediums and the existence of a “profusion of forms” in the contemporary art practice, but believes that “the medium’s unified field can nonetheless be charted.”¹²⁴

The heart of the problem is understanding the different concepts of the aesthetic medium engaged in the discussion. Neither Krauss nor Rebenitsch agree with the Greenbergian idea of the medium as defined by the unique and proper area of competence. Although Rebenitsch makes the point that Krauss steps away from Greenberg’s modernist position by acknowledging the dissolution of boundaries between arts and by questioning the idea that art has an essence that can be found in the material qualities of the means of representation, she sees the self-differing principle of the medium theorized by Krauss as residue of modernist thinking. Rebenitsch talks about “Rosalind E. Krauss’s more recent attempt to rehabilitate the modernist idea of medium specificity against the rise of intermedial installation art, which she regards as tainted by spectacle.”¹²⁵ The more recent attempt she refers to is Krauss’s book, *A Voyage to the North Sea*, in which she strongly criticizes installation art, conceptual art and the art of relational aesthetics for leading to the dissolution of the white cube and of the medium.

In Rebenitsch’s view, this criticism is intended as a defense of art from the “culture of spectacle” and the “aestheticization of the life-world.”¹²⁶ In other words, Krauss is attempting to defend art from life. It is this idea, Rațiu explains, that can be seen as a continuity of Greenbergian essentialism (“a modernism purified of any extra-aesthetic reference”¹²⁷) in Krauss’s theory.¹²⁸

Rebenitsch’s argument is that the concept of artistic autonomy is not dependent on the particular qualities of specific means of representation (Greenberg), nor on the reflecting on them (Krauss), but that autonomy can be guaranteed through aesthetic experience and not at the level of production. Although an important problem, it is not within the purpose of this study to expand on the analysis of aesthetic experience. However, it is the key of Juliane Rebenitsch’s argument and it must be mentioned, so we can understand the logic of her claim. Her point is that medium reflectivity is a possible but not necessary quality of art. Here she refers to Krauss’s theorization of the invention of mediums, which Rebenitsch regards as a reflection, from the part of the artists, on the specificity of the chosen mediums, from aesthetic or non-aesthetic spheres. Although Krauss, like Fried, criticizes Greenberg’s idea that all art

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

¹²⁵ J. Rebenitsch, *Aesthetics...*, p. 81.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁷ Rațiu, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

¹²⁸ I owe this clarification to my academic adviser, prof. dr. Dan Eugen Rațiu.

has an essence which can be found in the material qualities of the means of representation, Rebentisch claims that all three - Greenberg, Fried and Krauss - conceive aesthetic autonomy as a proper area of competence, determined by the medium of each individual art and that what Krauss is doing is an attempt at the rehabilitation of the modernist (Greenbergian idea) of medium specificity.¹²⁹ If we can agree with Rebentisch's reflection that Krauss accepts Greenberg's idea "that aesthetic autonomy cannot exist unless art defines its own area of competence", her interpretation of Krauss's position in respect to how that area of competence can be achieved is debatable. Art's area of competence is not, for Krauss, dependent on the individual mediums. If we understand Krauss's definition of the medium as technical support, we realize that it allows for transgression of boundaries between the individual arts. Moreover, the expanded field in which the medium can be found in Krauss's theorization, includes elements typically used in the mass culture. Krauss's restriction is not to the individual arts, and not even an exclusion of mass culture elements. She writes:

As opposed to these traditional foundations, "technical supports are generally borrowed from available mass-cultural forms, like animated films, automobiles, investigative journalism, or movies – hence "technical" replaces the "artisanal" materials of the guilds; in the same way "support" neutralizes the individual names of the *muses*.¹³⁰

The rehabilitation of medium specificity that Rebentisch criticized Krauss for requires yet another clarification. Not only does Krauss distance the medium from the modernist medium embedded in material coordinates, but redefine its specificity as differential. In exploring one of her knight's mediums, Bruce Nauman's "video promenades", she turns to Sam Weber's theorization of the medium of video. The defining condition of television, Weber argues in the essay "Television: Set and Screen", is difference. Krauss writes: "Weber's conclusion is that television had to be characterized through the term "differential specificity," which "though it sounds like a paradox, is necessary in order to respect the complexity of this form."¹³¹ Krauss sees in Naumann's *Mapping the Studio* an instance in which we take contact with Jameson's and Cavell's understanding of video specificity as "total flow", as well as Weber's, as "differential specificity." It is Weber's theorization that captures, for Krauss, the essence of video.¹³² This proposal of "differential specificity" together with the

¹²⁹ J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics...*, p. 81.

¹³⁰ R. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, p. 16.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 122. See Samuel Weber, "Television: Set and Screen," in Weber, *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1996.

¹³² *Ibidem*, pp. 119-122.

proposition of the “idea of rules as vehicle of specificity”¹³³ breaks the continuity with Greenberg’s positivist definition of specificity, one that coincides with material substance.

Believing that Krauss shares Greenberg’s concept of medium specificity – which we have attempted to show she does not - Rebetisch poses a question to both. She formulates this question by turning again to Luhmann: “Luhmann asks whether unity in multiplicity - that is, whether a specific logic of art in general, a logic that would *transcend* the various arts or works of art – might not be found in the structural logic of the interrelation of the medium and form.” Following his trail of thought, Rebetisch writes: “it would indeed be possible that this structural logic seems to realize something analogous with the terrains of various media – for example, a specific, autonomous function of art.”¹³⁴ Interestingly, Rebetisch comes to endorse the idea of a specific, structural logic of art. She refers to a logic of art in general, perhaps as a solution to what she seems to regard as the specific medium’s enclosure. This solution transcends the various mediums, just as Krauss’s definition of the medium as logic, convention or paradigm transcends the traditional mediums. Believing that a specific medium closes the intermedial possibilities of art, Rebetisch turns to the specificity of art in general as the source of autonomy. This is to be found in the structural logic of the interrelation of medium and form. She quotes Luhmann’s idea:

“Although perceptual media and artistic genres differ greatly with regard to their concrete materialization, they share a common ground in the manner in which they construct novel medium/form relations [...]. The unity of art resides in that it creates for the sake of observation and observes for the sake of being observed, and the medium of art consists in the freedom to create medium/form relations.”¹³⁵

Rebetisch’s analysis of Luhmann’s idea focuses on his description of art as “social media”, because “works of art, in other words, are media of communicative exchange between subjects.”¹³⁶ The idea of medium, nevertheless, plays an important role in Luhmann’s reflection, as “the medium of art and the “medium/form relations”. Rebetisch adheres to Luhmann’s definition of the medium as the unified medium of art: the medium of art can be understood as “the sum total of possible ways of crossing form boundaries (distinctions) from within toward the outside and of discovering fitting indications on the other side that stimulate further crossings by

¹³³ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

¹³⁴ J. Rebetisch, *Aesthetics...*, p. 85.

¹³⁵ N. Luhmann, *op. cit.*, p. 117, apud. J. Rebetisch, *Aesthetics...*, p. 86.

¹³⁶ J. Rebetisch, *Ibidem*.

virtue of their own boundaries."¹³⁷ Rebentisch's turn to the medium of art and the rejection of the specificity of mediums – be it Greenberg's definition of specificity, or Krauss's self-differing specificity – frees art from the demarcation of the muses, in other words, of the individual arts, and of tying artistic autonomy to them. As we have shown earlier, Krauss's medium as a technical support for the work of art, does not retain the separation between the traditional arts, but "neutralizes the individual names of the muses"¹³⁸.

As indicated previously, there is one separation that Rebentisch opposes that can be found in Krauss's reconception of the medium. It is not that between the individual arts, or, turning to Thierry de Duve's terminology, "between the 'generic' and the 'specific' (or the general and the particular)"¹³⁹, but the one between art and life. This is suggested by her rejection of installation art and favoring the white cube. Krauss sees the white cube as a warrantor of arts autonomy and of the medium: "the rules generated by the medium allows us to kick off against the cube's resistant surface."¹⁴⁰ Installation, on the other hand, is "ignored", "leaped over", by her knights of the medium.¹⁴¹ She declares installation "fake", "fraud", and "kitsch" and describes her book as "a call to remember, against the siren song of installation to "forget."¹⁴²

Krauss maps installation art as a combination of not-memory and not-forgetting, and kitsch, as "the combination of memory and its opposite (not-memory)."¹⁴³ In her view, the term installation art characterizes the current post-medium practice that Krauss's "small band of guerrillas" fight, a condition that is "engaged in the constant rehearsal of Duchamp's inaugural gesture".¹⁴⁴ Duchamp's well known gesture that Krauss refers to is the introduction of an object, the *readymade*, in the exhibition space of an art institution – in Duchamp's case a museum, but for the artists that practice installation art it can be also a gallery or an art fair – in order to ask "the general question - "What makes this *art*? - rather than the specific one of the medium".¹⁴⁵ When Krauss' knights move on the chessboard, they jump over installation art, and "place whole sections of modernist art in a fork".¹⁴⁶

¹³⁷ N. Luhmann, *op. cit.*, p. 118, apud. J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics...*, p. 87.

¹³⁸ R. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, p. 16.

¹³⁹ J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics...*, p. 36.

¹⁴⁰ R. Krauss, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 113; 126.

¹⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 69.

¹⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 128.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*. Here, Krauss is drawing from Thierry de Duve's analysis of the generic and the specific (or of the interrelation between art in general and particular arts). See Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 152.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

Krauss disapproves of such works as those already discussed as points the convergence of art and installation: “the early twentieth-century transformations of museum galleries into installations of sculptural incursions, like Duchamp’s *Étant donnés*, Lissitzky’s *Demonstration Room*, or Schwitters’s *Mertzbau*”, and of artists that “transform the museum galleries in installations”¹⁴⁷. Duchamp’s *Étant donnés* is a diorama in which a naked woman (the bride from his earlier work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*) is lying on her back, her legs spread, on a stack of hay. The nude bride holding a gas lamp against a landscape background, shielded from the public view with by a wooden door, can be seen only through a pair of peep-holes. For sure, Krauss writes, Duchamp is not a knight of the medium, because when he constructs the installation *Étant donnés* at the Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art, he contradicts one of Kant’s conditions for aesthetic judgement – that it must be spoken with a universal voice. In Krauss’s view, in the case of Duchamp’s work this is not possible, because the viewer is forced to become a “solitary spectator who can share his visual object with no one else.”¹⁴⁸ In this way, Duchamp disperses the medium and invalidates it for any aesthetic judgment.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, according to Rațiu, Krauss does not challenge installation’s status as a medium. As we have seen, in the Klein diagram Krauss places installation on the opposite side of the medium: “medium” is the combination of “memory” and “forgetting”; “installation” is the combination of “not-memory” and “not-forgetting”. As Rațiu points out, the position of installation in Krauss’s diagram mirrors the medium. It is, paradoxically a medium, a convention that negates the medium. In spite of her disapproval of it for the reasons discussed, Krauss does not call into question installation’s status as medium.¹⁵⁰

Conclusion

The analysis of installations mounted in exhibition spaces by artists such as Kiesler, El Lissitzky, or Duchamp reminds us that, even in modernism, the categories of art, design, and exhibition installation were not strictly delineated. Works such as *The Surrealist Gallery* at *Art of This Century*, *The Abstract Cabinet* or *One Mile of String* explored aspects of design and art simultaneously. These innovations led to a synthesis of the merging of art and design in room-size, environmental works. Julie Reiss rightly describes this transformation as an evolution towards installation

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁰ D. E. Rațiu, personal communication, 20 July, 2018.

art, and considers them proto-installations, whereas Germano Celant regards it as a development of exhibition installation. The two accounts are not mutually exclusive, but Celant's analysis nuances the discussion by focusing on the convergence of art and design, which implies an intermedial character of the works.

Our examination of two key positions toward the aesthetic medium in contemporary art and its implications for installation, Rosalind Krauss's and Juliane Rebentisch's, shows that Krauss's reconception of the medium as a paradigm (of memory versus forgetting) and her distancing of the medium from the material brings a substantial difference from Greenberg's modernist definition of the medium and its specificity. We also stress that this structural logic of Krauss's medium dispenses with genre boundaries. Rebentisch's interpretation of Krauss's endeavor as an attempt to rehabilitate the modernist idea of medium specificity is, in our view, neglecting Krauss's profound reconception of medium specificity, one that is no longer modernist, but postmodernist.

Rebentisch argues that Krauss follows Greenberg in linking the concept of art and its autonomy with a specialized engagement with a particular medium, as a strategy to protect art from the hybridization characteristic to postmodern art, best exemplified by installation art. Our assessment shows that Krauss's redefinition of the medium does not reject the transgression of medium or genre boundaries. Nevertheless, and this is an idea that Rebentisch opposes that can be found in Krauss, she does link arts' autonomy with the medium and the white cube, on the grounds that this provides a separation from the life world by virtue of their different aesthetic experiences.

With regard to Krauss's disapproval of installation, our analysis shows that it is not reserved to postmodern installation works, but extends to early examples of installation, the modern ones such as Duchamp's or Kiesler's. Therefore, but also because such installations, as we have seen, are instances of the convergence of art and installation in complete artworks, Krauss's criticism of installation art refers also to the works discussed in the first part of this paper. In our view, intermediality – the fusion of the different arts that, according to Rebentisch, undermines the classification into individual arts – is not the reason for Krauss's rejection, as Rebentisch believes, but the tendency of installation art to dispense with the white cube is, remembering that the white cube is, for Krauss, a warrantor of the medium and of autonomy. However, Krauss does not contest installation's status as a medium. Furthermore, as we show in the first two sections of this paper, it is as a medium that artists approach exhibition installation when creating the room-size works of the first half of the 20th century.

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THE ONE BEYOND SILENCE: THE APOPHATIC HENOLOGY OF PROCLUS

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ABSTRACT. For Proclus, “negations are truer than assertions” (*In Platonis Parmenidem* 70k), but for a negation to be issued, there must be a name that is denied. But if names are left out, then the negatives are no longer possible. All those aspects of the negation which lead us to discern the transcendent power are now found inapplicable. The negation of negation is the one that introduces us in the appropriate state of silence. The theme of silence is extremely important within the Proclean view of union with the One and it is reached only after intense striving and intellectual effort. The entire dialectical method, even if it operates by way of negations, is nothing but a preamble to the mystical union, removing whatever impedes the contemplation of the One. While the soul cannot know the One, it can attain likeness to the One, experiencing its unity: the way of negation is the precondition for this, purifying the soul for the inflow of divine inspiration. The silence points beyond itself to the One who is beyond all silence.

Keywords: *Proclus, the One, apophasis, negation of negation, silence, transcendence*

Proclus (412 – 485 AD) has more to say about the logic of the *via negativa* using terms which are much more technical than in any previous Neoplatonic philosopher. His discussion is shaped in the language of the Platonic dialogues *Parmenides* and *Sophist* and reflects a systematic contribution to the development of this tradition. Technically speaking, *apophasis* is employed by Proclus to designate the way of negation; his use of the term marks a conceptual shift, as Plotinus and the Middle Platonists favoured *aphairesis* (abstraction) instead. Supposedly, Proclus was not innovative here, the Athenian tradition of *apophasis* having been already

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set. This change of tone from abstraction to negation “marked a radicalization of the negative method: that the later the date, the more radical the refusal of language.”² The aim of this study is to investigate the role of negation in Proclus as the ultimate tool which prepares the soul to attain mystical union with the One. Negations do not possess the ability to reveal the nature of the One: they lead to the transcendence of the first principle. Negative discourse removes one by one all the levels of existence with which our thinking operates, culminating in its own removal. Negation of negation is that which introduces us into the appropriate state of silence. Silence is the natural conclusion of the *via negativa*. The way of negation becomes nothing more than a preamble to the mystical union, a preparation for the ultimate goal of unification.

1. Negation and Transcendence

In his *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*,³ Proclus investigates the status of the negations which express the transcendence. The transcendence causes the removal of all the attributes circumscribed to being. Negation itself has many meanings and it is necessary to specify the sense ascribed to the negations which denote the transcendence. Proclus discerns between two types of negation: we can negate something of a thing when, among a range of qualities, we choose the ones appropriate to it and reject the others; at the same time, we can negate of a certain reality everything which does not have contact with it, *i.e.* everything which is alien to it by nature. Instead, in the case of the absolute One, negations have an entirely different status and relevance. In order to explain the negations corresponding to the One, Proclus overturns the above significance of negation. Firstly, all these negations applied to the first principle do not mark any deficiency of the One, but its superiority in regard to all other things.

The fact that we remove from the principle any trace of plurality and manifestation situated on the level of being, does not simply mean that the principle would be “deprived” of all these and that it would need them. More precisely, Proclus clearly differentiates between the “Non-being” of the One⁴ and its specific negations,

² See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, Hanstein, Frankfurt am Main/Bonn, 1986, p. 97 and 106.

³ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1074.22-1075.16 Cousin.

⁴ Proclus wishes to specify that the expression τὸ μὴ ὄν has three different meanings: “For ‘One’ has three senses: one as superior to Being, another as coordinate with Being, and another as inferior to Being” – τὸ μὲν ὡς κρείττον τοῦ ὄντος, τὸ δὲ ὡς τῷ ὄντι σύστοιχον, τὸ δὲ ὡς ὑφειμένον τοῦ ὄντος (*In Platonis Parmenidem* 1039.29-30 Cousin; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on*

respectively, the “non-being” and the negation corresponding to Matter – on the other side of the hierarchical reality.⁵ In *Platonic Theology*,⁶ Proclus confronts the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides* with the Fifth one:⁷ the result is that both hypotheses arrive at some negative conclusions.

The First Hypothesis refers to the absolute One, excluding from it everything else, while the Fifth Hypothesis shows that those which come out completely outside of the One cannot receive any kind of affirmative attribute, falling into *pure negativity*. But, if the First Hypothesis refers to the absolute One and expresses its superiority to everything else, the Fifth Hypothesis is to be found at the opposite extremity, being concerned with Matter, which holds no quality because it lacks form and evades being. Still, the absolute One evades being by its superiority to it, while Matter evades being by its inferiority. The One is a Non-being “by excess” (καθ’ ὑπεροχῆν), and any addition pertaining to being would limit and diminish it, while Matter is a non-being “by defect” (κατὰ ἔλλειψιν) which tends to receive a form, to become a particular being.⁸

The negations of Matter indicate the privation (στέρησις) of being, while the negations of the One denote the exceeding of being.⁹ Thus, though the One itself is a Non-being, it is not a pure nothingness, but a Non-being superior to being. Secondly, the things that are negated (ἀποφασκομένω) of the One do not remain outside of it –

Plato’s Parmenides, p. 400). Cf. *Theologia Platonica* II.5, 38.26-39.5 Saffrey/Westerink. While the first one τὸ μὴ ὄν is, to Proclus, the one at the end of the First Hypothesis of *Plato’s Parmenides* (142e2) – identical to the first principle –, the second one is identical to the τὸ μὴ ὄν in the *Sophist* 256d11-e2, and the third one is identical to the Matter, characterized for that matter by στέρησις (for the latter aspect, cf. Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.5, 99.3-5 Saffrey/Westerink). Cf. S. Lilla, “La teologia negativa dal pensiero greco classico”, *Helikon*, vol. 29-30, 1989-1990, p. 175, n. 776.

⁵ Cf. Marilena Vlad, “Transcendance et causalité. Proclus sur le principe premier”, *Chora. Revue d’études anciennes et médiévales*, vol. 7-8, 2009-2010, p. 61.

⁶ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* I.12, 21-22 Saffrey/Westerink.

⁷ Plato, *Parmenides* 159b2-160b4. See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 106 sq.

⁸ On the Neoplatonic interpretation of the conclusion of the First Hypothesis of *Parmenides* in terms of “negation by defect” or “negation by excess”, see J. Trouillard, “Le Parménide de Platon et son interprétation néoplatonicienne”, *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, vol. 23, 1973, p. 94 sq.

⁹ If, e.g., someone says that “he is not happy”, it might be assumed that he is actually *more than* happy, in fact in a state of delirious ecstasy. Alternatively, he could be non-happy in the opposite sense, in that he is *unhappy*. A first form of the negative points to a *superiority* (ὑπεροχῆ), while the other one indicates a *defect* (ἔλλειψις). Such a reduction in the scope of the *negation* was very necessary because, from the theological perspective, it is obviously necessary that the negatives be directed in an *upward* direction. Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 107.

as if there were no communion between their nature and the superior One¹⁰ –, but on the contrary they are in fact derived from the preceding One (παράγεται ἐκεῖθεν) and are brought into being by the prior One (ὑφέστηκεν ἐκεῖθεν).¹¹ The principle is not just an absolute negation and removal – which would lack relevance to those removed things.¹² In fact, it has the power to bring into existence all the things which it transcends – consequently, all that we negate of it. Proclus says that “The One, therefore, entirely transcends an order of this kind, and is the cause of it” – πάντη ἄρα τὸ ἐν ἐκβέβηκε τῆς τοιαύτης τάξεως καὶ αἰτιὸν ἐστὶν αὐτῆς.¹³

The negatives derive then their significance by starting from an ontological basis. In the second case – that of privation –, the lack of a specific kind of being gives the negative its content; in the first case, the presence of being underlies the superiority which the negative encircles. Nonetheless, the second case requires a certain continuity between the superior and the inferior stage. The concept of continuity is constitutive to the Proclean negative theology because, for the negation of superiority to be efficient as a theological instrument, some continuity between the ontological levels is needed. Even though the first principle has an existence by itself – independent of its inferior manifestations –, there must be nonetheless a link between it and the existence of those to which it is the cause and the source. If this ontological continuity is not present, then we are not guaranteed that the negative process really leads to ascension:¹⁴

Let not, however, anyone considering these *negations* to be such things as *privations* despise such a mode of discussion, nor defining the sameness in words analogously, and words in habitudes, endeavour to calumniate this anagogic progression to the first principle – Καὶ μοι μηδεὶς μήτε τὰς ἀποφάσεις ταύτας οἶον

¹⁰ Just as mathematical objects and colours are mutually exclusive.

¹¹ *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1074.35-1075.1 Cousin.

¹² Proclus insists on the difference between the One and “nothing”: even if both are negations of being, the One is not a mere non-being. In *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII (46k Klibansky/Labowsky; cf. 504.221-222 Steel/Rumbach), Proclus notices the similarity between “nothing” (οὐδέν) – defined as “not even one” (οὐδὲ ἓν) – and the absolute One, of which, in the First Hypothesis of the Plato’s *Parmenides*, it is said to be “not even one”. To distinguish between the two, Proclus shows that, if the *nothing* is a complete suppression of anything – even of the One –, instead, the first One is not an absolute suppression of the One, but of the one who accompanies the being – of the *intelligible one*. Cf. Marilena Vlad, “Transcendance et causalité. Proclus sur le principe premier”, p. 62, n. 24.

¹³ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.12, 66.16-17 Saffrey/Westerink (trans. Th. Taylor, in *The Platonic Theology*, vol. I, p. 140). Cf. Marilena Vlad, “Transcendance et causalité. Proclus sur le principe premier”, p. 61-62.

¹⁴ R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 107-108.

στερήσεις εἶναι τιθέμενος ἀτιμαζέτω τὸν τοιοῦτον τῶν λόγων τρόπον, μήτε τὴν ἀναλογίαν ἐν λόγων ταυτότητι τοὺς δὲ λόγους ἐν σχέσεσιν ἀφοριζόμενος διαβάλλειν ἐπιχειρεῖτω τὴν ἀναγωγὸν ταύτην πορείαν ἐπὶ τὴν πρωτίστην ἀρχήν.¹⁵

Taking as premise the above excerpt, we could assume that, in Proclus' time, there was a debate concerning the value of these two ways of knowing the divine: analogy and negation.¹⁶ It would seem that ἀπόφασις was repudiated on the grounds of its relation to privation, and Proclus tried to counteract such an opinion by introducing "the negation of superiority".

In his *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, Proclus discusses the nature of negations and the extent of their superiority or inferiority in regard with the corresponding affirmations. There was clearly a trend which claimed that affirmation was preferable to negation, presupposing that negation was just a privation of something, while affirmation implied a presence.¹⁷ This view was substantiated by the Plato's *Sophist* which brought into attention being and non-being.¹⁸ Privation was identified with "non-being", a lack of a certain kind, while affirmation was perceived in reference to being. Following this equivalence, negation was reduced to privation and was considered as indicating "the absence of something". In this situation, Proclus argues that the *Sophist* explicitly suggests various meanings for "non-being": it could designate what is superior to being, or equal to it, or inferior to it, so that – if negation was coupled with non-being – it would carry three possible senses: *superiority* to affirmation, *coordinated* with affirmation, and *inferiority* to affirmation.¹⁹

2. The Typology of Negation

There are three kinds of negations: some negations are lower than affirmations, as in the case of something that does not possess a characteristic because it is absent, although it could have been present; some negations are equal to affirmations, as in

¹⁵ *Theologia Platonica* II.5, 38.13-18 Saffrey/Westerink (trans. Th. Taylor, in *The Platonic Theology*, vol. I, p. 118-119). Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 107-108.

¹⁶ See W. Beierwaltes, *Proklos. Grundzuge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 339 sq.

¹⁷ Cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1072 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 425 sq.).

¹⁸ Plato, *Sophista* 258a-b.

¹⁹ See Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 1073.2-8 Cousin; 1076.4-12 Cousin. Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 108. Cf. also Marilena Vlad, *Dincolo de ființă. Neoplatonismul și aporiile originii inefabile* (*Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporias of the Ineffable Origin*), Zeta Books Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011, p. 256.

the case of something that possesses a negative characteristic which nevertheless has a positive significance; and some negations are superior to affirmations, as in the case of something that does not possess a characteristic because it transcends this characteristic.²⁰ Inferior negation refers to the being which is superior to non-being (as defect), the coordinated negation refers to the being which has the same rank as non-being and, finally, the type of negation superior to affirmation reflects the type of Non-Being which is beyond being.²¹

Only if negation stands under the sign of the Non-being *superior* to being, is it superior to affirmation. In the situation of the non-being which is of the same rank with the being, both negations and affirmations can be adequately applied to being.²² In the circumstance of Non-being which is *beyond* being, neither affirmations nor negations properly apply. Nonetheless, because no statement is completely true of the Non-being totally unrelated with being, “at least negation is more properly uttered of it than affirmation” – κυριώτερον ἂν ἢ ἀπόφασις ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ ῥηθῆι τῆς καταφάσεως.²³ Moreover, affirmations have something *definite*, while negations refer to an *indefinite* horizon, as the concept of “not-man” is much more undefined than that of “man”:²⁴

So then, it is more proper to reveal the incomprehensible and indefinable cause which is the One through negations; for assertions slice up reality, whereas negations tend to simplify things from distinction and definition in the direction of being uncircumscribed, and from being set apart by their proper boundaries in the direction of being unbounded – Τὴν οὖν ἀπερίληπτον καὶ ἀπερίοριστον τοῦ ἑνὸς αἰτίαν οἰκειότερόν ἐστιν ἐνδείκνυσθαι διὰ τῶν ἀποφάσεων· ἀποτεμαχίζουσι γὰρ αἱ καταφάσεις τὰ ὄντα, ἀναπλωτικαὶ δέ εἰσιν αἱ ἀποφάσεις ἀπὸ τῶν περιγεγραμμένων ἐπὶ τὸ ἀπερίγραφον καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν διηρημένων ὄροις οἰκείοις ἐπὶ τὸ ἀόριστον.²⁵

²⁰ L.J. Rosán, *The Philosophy of Proclus. The Final Phase of Ancient Thought*, “Cosmos”, New-York, 1949, p. 122-123.

²¹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1072.32 sq. Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 425).

²² Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1073.14-18 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 426).

²³ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1073.20-21 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 426).

²⁴ Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 172-173. On negation as indefinite possibility, see É. Bréhier, “L’idée du néant et le problème de l’origine radicale dans le néoplatonisme grec”, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1919, p. 265.

²⁵ Proclus, *In Parmenidem*, VI, 1074.4-11 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 427).

In *On interpretation*, Aristotle labels the notion of “non-man” as being an *indefinite noun* (ὄνομα ἀόριστον)²⁶ and does not see in it any negation (οὔτε ἀπόφασίς ἐστίν).²⁷ As a matter of fact, the indefinite aspect is the most striking one in a negation: it is a *non-specific affirmation*; “non-man”, *e.g.*, could refer to everything from the spectrum of beings, except the only element of “man”. Negation leaves open the range of possible affirmations, and Proclus makes a point of virtue from this *openness*, comparing it with the *narrowness* of selection – intrinsic in affirmation.²⁸

Proclus²⁹ correlates this view – which postulates that negation detains the role of opening up the sphere of discourse rather than closing it – with the treatment of the non-being in terms of otherness, taken over from the *Sophist*.³⁰ Negation will demand only otherness – and not the contrariety:

when we say that something “is not” (μὴ ὄν), we are only uttering a denial (ἄρνησιν) of being (τοῦ ὄντος), not stating the opposite of being (ἐναντίον τοῦ ὄντος), by “opposite” meaning that which is at the furthest remove from being and is completely devoid of it – ὅτι ἡνίκα ἂν λέγωμεν μὴ ὄν, ἄρνησιν μόνον λέγομεν τοῦ ὄντος, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐναντίον τῷ ὄντι, λέγων ἐναντίον ὃ πλεῖστον τοῦ ὄντος ἀφέστηκε καὶ τελέως αὐτοῦ ἀποπέπτωκεν.³¹

Consequently, Proclus restricts negation to a form of differentiation, against those who rejected negation on the grounds that it had only a privative connotation. As Mortley shows, the question of negation and privation must have been of great importance in Proclus’ circle, because he devotes other pages to this problem, pointing out the necessity to distinguish them:³²

In the third place, in addition to what has been said, I determine, concerning the mode of negation, that they are not privative of their subjects but generative of things which are as it were their opposites – Τρίτον δὲ αὖ πρὸς τοῖς εἰρημένους περὶ τοῦ τρόπου διορίζομαι τῶν ἀποφάσεων, ὡς οὐκ εἰσὶ στερητικαὶ τῶν ὑποκειμένων ἀλλὰ γεννητικαὶ τῶν οἷον ἀντικειμένων.³³

²⁶ Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 16a32.

²⁷ Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 16a31.

²⁸ Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 108. See also R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 1: *The Rise and Fall of Logos*, p. 137.

²⁹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* V, 1000 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 350).

³⁰ See Plato, *Sophista* 255a sq.

³¹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 1000.25-29 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 350).

³² Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 109.

³³ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.10, 2.63.8-10 Saffrey/Westerink (trans. Saffrey/ Westerink, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 63). Cf. Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.5, 48.13-39.5 Saffrey/Westerink; I.12, 57.21-22 Saffrey/Westerink; *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1074.15-16,

It is clear enough that Proclus did not have in mind the fact that negation generates contrariness: in the first place, he chooses the term ἀντικειμένων (“opposition”), rather than ἐναντίον (“contrary”) – as it appears in the *Sophist*.³⁴ As results from the argumentation of Henry D. Saffrey and Leendert G. Westerink, it is necessary to invoke the word οἶον (“what might be called”) prior to ἀντικειμένων³⁵ which inculcates a “tentative tone”: to deprive the One of a certain thing through negation is to make that thing be, but nonetheless it cannot pass as a *true* contrary for what is negated of the One. For example, the negation of the multiplicity applied to the One reclaims the existence of the multiple, but this does not mean that the One should essentially be “the contrary of the multiple”. Likewise, by negating everything of the One, we will not have any positive determination or real knowledge of it.³⁶ Following Mortley’s conclusions, what Proclus wants to prove here is the fact that “negation is productive³⁷ of a counter-balancing affirmation at the next lower stage.”³⁸

Negations cannot be privative because privations can only refer to something which has the ability to be really definite. However, in a typical dialectical manner, Proclus reminds us that

the first principle is not simply deprived of the things that are negated of it, nor are these things without any communion with the One, but they are actually derived from that source – Τὸ γὰρ πρῶτον οὐχ ἀπλῶς ἀπέσπασται τῶν ἀποφασκομένων, οὐδὲ ἀκοινωνητά ἐστι πάντα ταῦτα πρὸς τὸ ἓν, ἀλλὰ παράγεται ἐκεῖθεν.³⁹

Thus, the negations of the One retain, on one hand, the significance of the transcendence of the One with regard to all things and, on the other hand, they give back to the One its role as the “cause of all things” – which were in the first instance negated of the One. Following his master, Syrianus,⁴⁰ Proclus establishes a relation of

1075.36-37, 1076.10-12, 1099.31-32, 1133.4-5 Cousin; VII, 1208.22-24 Cousin. Cf. H.-D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, n. 2, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 118.

³⁴ Plato, *Sophista* 257b3.

³⁵ The same expression appears in Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1092.36-37 Cousin: πανταχοῦ τὸ πρῶτως ἕκαστον ἓν ἐξήρηται τῶν οἶον ἀντικειμένων.

³⁶ H.-D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, n. 2, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 118.

³⁷ On the “productive sense” of negations, cf. also C. Steel, “*Negatio negationis*. Proclus on the final lemma of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*”, in *Traditions of Platonism. Essays in honour of John Dillon*, ed. J.J. Cleary, p. 363.

³⁸ In this context, the term ἀντικειμένων might be best translated by “counter-weight”; cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 110.

³⁹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 1074.33-35 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 427, modified). Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 173.

⁴⁰ Cf. also S. Lilla, “La teologia negativa dal pensiero greco classico”, *Helikon*, vol. 29-30, 1989-1990, p. 138.

precise correspondence between the negations of the First Hypothesis and the affirmations of the Second Hypothesis,⁴¹ revealing that “all those positive assertions proceed from these negations, and the cause of these is the One, as being prior to all other things.”⁴² The negations do not embody a “lack” in or a “privation” of the absolute One, but actually hide the transcendence of the *cause* in regard to everything it generates.⁴³

In the light of this reasoning, the affirmations of the Second Hypothesis are made possible exactly by those negations inserted in the First Hypothesis.⁴⁴ Proclus names the negations (ἀποφάσεις) “mothers of assertions” (μητέρες εἰσὶ τῶν καταφάσεων) and is convinced that he has demonstrated, through his mechanism of “kataphatic *apophasis*”, how the middle order of realities is established.⁴⁵ All that is affirmed in the Second Hypothesis “proceeds” from what was negated in the First

⁴¹ Cf. also Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 174.

⁴² Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 1075.16-22 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 428). See also Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 1061.23-31, 1085.12-17 Cousin. According to Proclus's testimony, Syrianus is the first one to notice that everything that is stated in the Second Hypothesis is denied in the First one (cf. Marilena Vlad, *Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporias of the Ineffable Origin*, p. 255, n. 1). Thus, Proclus argues that negations generate assertions because everything that is denied to the One proceeds from him. Cf. J. Trouillard, *L'Un et l'Âme selon Proclus*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1972, p. 88. On primitive, assertion-generating negation, see also É. Bréhier, “L'idée du néant et le problème de l'origine radicale dans le néoplatonisme grec”, p. 265 sq.

⁴³ Cf. Marilena Vlad, “Transcendance et causalité. Proclus sur le principe premier”, p. 62. Negations [of the Matter] are *privations*, while negations [of the One] are *transcendent* causes of all their effects. Cf. Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* I.12, 57.21-22 Saffrey/Westerink. Cf. also Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1076.25-29 Cousin: “We talk of the Monad as being devoid of number, not in the sense of its being inferior to numbers and indefinite, but rather in the sense that it produces and defines numbers” (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 429). Cf. J. Trouillard, “Le Parménide de Platon et son Interprétation Néoplatonicienne”, p. 95; *L'Un et l'Âme selon Proclus*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ Proclus calls negations (ἀποφάσεις) “the mothers of assertions” – μητέρες εἰσὶ τῶν καταφάσεων (*In Platonis Parmenidem* 1133.3-5 Cousin; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 472) and is convinced that he has proven through the procedure of “kataphatic *apophasis*”, precisely how the middle order of realities is established. Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 114. See also Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 1208.22-24 Cousin. Cf. also Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 174, n. 103.

⁴⁵ R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 114.

Hypothesis.⁴⁶ Proclus conceives the generation of the Being by the One as a complementary process of the transcendence of the One. We are dealing with a double “detachment” of the One in relation to Being (and to each of its “classes” or “orders” of being): thus, the detachment of the One as transcendent beyond Being is accomplished through the negation of the “orders” of being; on the other hand, the inauguration or the generation of all the orders of being is made through the detachment from the preceding One, which remains unreachable, caught in this network of successive negations. The One imposes itself as transcendent through the negation of all the classes of being; but, at the same time – in a complementary movement, of opposite orientation – these classes of being “emerge” through the initial negation and suppression; they unfold one by one, as they are negated of the One.⁴⁷

Therefore, as Jean Trouillard notes, “la négation du Parménide est plus libératrice que les autres formes de négation employées par Platon” – for example in the *Sophist* and the *Philebus* – and the three of them must not be mixed up:⁴⁸ the negation of the *Sophist* – or the otherness which is the non-being implied by each determination; the one of the *Philebus* – or the indeterminacy implied by the entire system of determinations; and the one of the *Parmenides* – which denies, at the same time, the identity and the otherness, the determination and the indeterminacy. “Only the third negation” is designated by Trouillard as being “the one which reveals the authentic ineffable”. For “otherness” and “determination” are still on the intelligible level. Negation of the negative theology is totally different:

⁴⁶ In that negative statements cause positive ones, Proclus emphasizes “the generating power of the negation”. See, in this respect, R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 112-113.

⁴⁷ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.10, 63.11–12 Saffrey/Westerink: “For because the first principle is not many, the many proceed from it, and because it is not a whole, wholeness proceeds from it, and in a similar manner in other things” (trans. Th. Taylor, in *The Platonic Theology*, vol. I, p. 138). Cf. Marilena Vlad, “Transcendance et causalité. Proclus sur le principe premier”, p. 66.

⁴⁸ On the distinction between the three types of negation found in the Platonic dialogues, see J. Trouillard: *L’Un et l’Âme selon Proclus*, p. 136 sq.; Idem, “Le Parménide de Platon et son interprétation néoplatonicienne”, p. 95 sq.; Idem, “Théologie négative et psychogonie chez Proclus”, in *Plotino e il Neoplatonismo in Oriente e in Occidente*, Accademia dei Lincei, Rome, 1974, p. 254 sq. Cf. S. Breton, “Négation et négativité proclusiennes dans l’œuvre de Jean Trouillard”, in *Proclus et son influence: actes du colloque de Neuchâtel* (juin 1985), eds. G. Boss and G. Seel, Éditions du Grand Midi, Zürich, 1987, p. 86 sq.

It is not, then, simply true that assertion is always superior to negation, but there is a case where it takes second place to it, when negation expresses that type of Not-Being which is beyond Being – Οὐκ ἄρα μονοειδῶς ἢ κατάφασις ἀεὶ τῆς ἀποφάσεως κρείττων, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ὅπου καὶ τὴν δευτέραν ἔλαχε τάξιν, ὅταν ἡ ἀπόφασις ἐκεῖνο λέγῃ τὸ μὴ ὄν ὃ ἔστιν ἐπέκεινα τοῦ ὄντος.⁴⁹

Consequently, the usual negation – as part of discourse – is subordinated to affirmation. But negation of the negative theology is not anymore a function of language, but its limitation. Thus, it must be double: it denies the quality which we are tempted to affirm, but it dismisses at the same time the privation of this quality so that we should refuse the alternatives in language and abolish meaning. This is in order to avoid falling into a vacuum – as the privation was excluded – or being involved in another affirmation (*antithesis* or *synthesis* – which would be consistent with the previous one), and instead to look for the source of the affirmation *beyond* affirmation. It is about then of a “supra-logical negation” which Proclus denominates ὑπεραποφάσις – transcendent negation.⁵⁰

3. The Negation of Negation

Proclus understands the manoeuvre in the *Parmenides* 142a – where it is concluded that: “Therefore, no name belongs to it, nor is there an account or any knowledge or perception or opinion of it” – Οὐδ' ὄνο μάζεται ἄρα οὐδὲ λέγεται οὐδὲ δοξάζεται οὐδὲ γινώσκεται⁵¹ – as the proclamation of the final negation. For Proclus, “negations are truer than assertions,”⁵² but for a negation to be issued, there must be a name that is denied. But if names are left out, then the negatives are no longer possible.

⁴⁹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1073.8-12 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 426).

⁵⁰ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 1172.35 Cousin. Cf. J. Trouillard, “Théologie négative et autoconstitution psychique chez les néoplatoniciens”, in *Savoir, faire, espérer: les limites de la raison*, Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, Bruxelles, 1976, p. 311.

⁵¹ Plato, *Parmenides* 142a4-5.

⁵² Cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 70k Klibansky/Labowsky (519.96-97 Steel): Neque ergo abnegationes uere de uno, sed magis quidem abnegationes quam affirmations (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 601).

...even the power of generating all things, which we said was a characteristic of negation, does not belong to the One, and therefore, even if it is said to generate and to produce, these expressions are transferred to it from the sphere of the existent, since they are the most distinguished names of powers – *le neque potentiam generatiuam totorum ipsum habere, qualem esse abnegationem dicebamus. Etsi igitur generare dicatur, etsi substituere, ab entibus ad ipsum transferuntur honoratissima omnium nominum uirtutibus iacentium.*⁵³

All those aspects of the negation which lead us to discern the transcendent power are now found inapplicable. The negation of negation⁵⁴ is the one that introduces us in the appropriate state of silence:⁵⁵ “for by means of a negation, he too removes all the negations” – Τῷ γὰρ ἀποφάναι καὶ αὐτὸς ἀφεῖλεν πάσας τὰς ἀποφάσεις.⁵⁶

It is interesting, however, that the Latin phrase “*negatio negationis*” does not appear as such in the texts of Proclus. It will be assumed by Meister Eckhart who gives it a decisive role in his theological discourse. In Eckhart’s vision, we must first remove from God all attributes related to beings. However, as a last resort, we must remove even the negations, bearing in mind that no negation is possible in the case of God, because we cannot deny anything to God. Therefore, we must remove all negations (ἀφεῖλεν πάσας τὰς ἀποφάσεις) – and this is the *negatio negationis*. All this reasoning is arranged on a line symmetrical with the arguments of Proclus, and the assumption of some researchers of an influence of Proclus on Eckhart was only a step away. Yet, as argued by C. Steel, besides the historically not very plausible character of such a thesis, the fact that Eckhart understands this negation of negation in a completely different way is unquestionable. Indeed, for him, “*negatio negationis* is the most pure and most perfect affirmation as is God’s self-revelation ‘I am Who I am’.”⁵⁷ Eckhart’s intention is thus characterized by this

⁵³ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 72k Klibansky/Labowsky (520.25-28 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 602).

⁵⁴ The *negation of negation* is also present – even if not in an explicit manner – in Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.5.6.26. On the history of the formula *negatio negationis*, see R. Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed., the Warburg Institute, London, 1950, p. 22 sq.; K. Hedwig, “*Negatio negationis*. Problemgeschichtliche Aspekte einer Denkstruktur”, *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, vol. 24, 1955, p. 7–33.

⁵⁵ R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 116.

⁵⁶ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 76k Klibansky/Labowsky (521.68 Steel; cf. 521.721-722 Steel/Rumbach; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 603).

⁵⁷ Meister Eckhart, *In Exodus*, n. 74 (*Lateinische Werke* II, 77.9-12, eds. K. Weiß, H. Fischer, J. Koch, and Loris Sturlese, vol. II, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1952): “Nulla ergo negatio, nihil negativum deo competit, nisi negatio negationis, quam significat unum negative dictum ‘deus

“combination of negative theology with the affirmation of pure Being”. As to Proclus, the negation of negation cannot have any *affirmative* power: it *only* brings us to the state of *absolute silence*.⁵⁸

Raoul Mortley⁵⁹ admits that “there is clearly some attractiveness in the idea of the paradox of a final negation which illuminates and destroys itself in one act; the last conceivable linguistic move, which has at once a positive and negative force, but which is final”. There is indeed a great fascination in the idea of this *linguistic instrument* which manages to carry out the last task that it is asked to perform, but which disappears *in* and *by* the very act of doing it. Nevertheless, Mortley warns us, “this idea is not developed in Proclus, and ought not to be presented as the key phase in demonstrating the primacy of silence.”⁶⁰ Proclus does not seem concerned about developing negation in this logic. Rather, his intention is to *dismiss* negation from the new stage, in which the soul no longer knows, but “abides in the One.”⁶¹ The Proclean approach underlines the decisive idea that negation is a form of language and it cannot be used further. Not so much is negation removed, but the entire language, and this constitutes the main interest

unus est’. Negatio vero negationis purissima et plenissima affirmatio: ‘ergo sum qui sum’” (trans. B. McGinn, in *Eckhart Preacher-teacher*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1986, p. 68). See also “The negation of negations is Divine Affirmation”, in C.F. Kelley, *Meister Eckhart on Divine Knowledge*, Frog Books, 2008, Berkley, California, p. 106-113. On *negatio negationis* in Meister Eckhart, see V. Lossky, *Théologie Négative et Connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart*, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 1998, p. 68 sq.; B. Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart. Analogy, Univocity and Unity*, trans. O.F. Summerell, B.R. Grüner Publishing Co., Amsterdam, 2001, p. 95 sq.; Markus Enders, “Meister Eckhart’s Understanding of God”, in *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, ed. Jeremiah M. Hackett, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2013, p. 359-388 (esp. p. 366 sq.). On the differences between Eckhart and Proclus related to this formulation, see W. Beierwaltes, “Exkurs IV: *Negatio negationis*”, in *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 395-398.

⁵⁸ Cf. C. Steel, “*Negatio negationis*. Proclus on the final lemma of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*”, in *Traditions of Platonism. Essays in honour of John Dillon*, ed. J.J. Cleary, p. 367-368.

⁵⁹ See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 117. Mortley does not see in Proclus’ statement a particular emphasis on the negation of negation theme, in the last part of the *Commentary on Parmenides*, and amends W. Beierwaltes’ tendency (“*Negation der Negation*”, in *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 361-366; “*Exkurs IV: Negatio negationis*”, in *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 395-398) to excessively highlight this subject in Proclus.

⁶⁰ As W. Beierwaltes seems to present it, in *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 364: “Da jegliches Denken, das sich im Wort ausspricht, die unmittelbare Einheit mit dem Ursprung zerstörte, ist nach der Negation der Negation die gemässe Weise, in der allein sich das Ereignis der Einung zu vollziehen vermag, das Schweigen.”

⁶¹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (521.63-64 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 603).

of Proclus in relation to the final negation: “negation is not denied *qua* negation, but *qua* linguistic manoeuvre, and Proclus is more concerned to be rid of all forms of language.”⁶²

But since, as he advances, he has taken away from it not only everything else but also participation in substance and Being, which itself is of high value, and has shown that it is neither expressible nor knowable, now at the end he rightly removes from it even the negations themselves – *Quoniam autem progrediens interemit ab ipso alia omnia, et participare essentia, et le esse ipsum ualde honorabile unum, et ostendit quod neque dicibile est neque cognoscibile, merito ultimas utique dicet et ipse abnegationes ab uno.*⁶³

He is therefore right in ending with the removal even of the negatives, saying that it is impossible that they should express anything about the One, which is inexpressible and unknowable – *Merito ergo ultimo et ipsas abnegationes remouit ab uno, impossibile dicens has esse circa unum indicibile et incognoscibile existens.*⁶⁴

Proclus suggests only the fact that negation would have consumed its utility, leading the soul on the penultimate stage only. The self-suppression of negation is nothing more than self-suppression:⁶⁵ it is not an event with two sides – one positive and another one negative.⁶⁶ “I do not see this negation of negation as a positive step like those of the previous stages,” Mortley concludes. The final negation, “the negation of negation, including all language, reveals nothing about the One.”⁶⁷

⁶² R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 117.

⁶³ See Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 70k Klibansky/Labowsky (518.89-92 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 600).

⁶⁴ See Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 72k Klibansky/Labowsky (519.0-2 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 601).

⁶⁵ For Proclus, “the purpose of the *via negativa* is the transportation of the soul to the penultimate stage”, and its handling coincides with the one of Clement of Alexandria and Plotinus. The negative method leads one upwards, but not to the Supreme One. Proclus gives an actual phrase for what had been only implicitly understood till then: “negation is a tool which causes its own supersession.” Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 118.

⁶⁶ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (521.50-52 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 602): “But after going through all the negations, one ought to set aside this dialectical method also, as being troublesome and introducing the notion of the things denied with which the One can have no neighbourhood.”

⁶⁷ R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 116, 118.

Mortley's interpretation of the *negatio negationis* seems to find itself in divergence with Beierwaltes' view – which identifies the entire process of negation with that preparation for the ultimate goal of unification.⁶⁸

However, as noted by Carlos Steel,⁶⁹ the dialectical reasoning by way of negation can never be a substitute for this tension: “these dialectical operations are the preparation for the strain towards the One, but are not themselves the strain” – *Preparatio enim est hec eius que in illius tensionis, sed non tensio*.⁷⁰

If the negations themselves are not removed, we run the risk of making the One multiple.⁷¹ Even negations can divert the soul and obstruct its pure vision: the soul must relinquish the attempt of reaching something, for even “the strain” (*tensio*) – which is not a dialectical method – must be abandoned.⁷² After this moment, words are no longer necessary, as nothing more can be said, and so we must resort to the last move, beyond the dialectical level. The voiced word exercised its function and sounded to its best; for the rest, it requires “contemplation in silence”. The silence points beyond itself to the One who is beyond all silence. It is the means whereby we can rise beyond all level of discourse.⁷³

⁶⁸ See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 116 sq.; W. Beierwaltes, *Proklos. Grundzuge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 361 sq. Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 182-183.

⁶⁹ C. Steel, “Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus' *Parmenides* and the Origin of Negative Theology”, in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. M. Pickavé, p. 598, n. 62.

⁷⁰ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem VII*, 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (521.61-62 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 603). Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 117.

⁷¹ Cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem VII*, 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (520.46 sq. Steel).

⁷² Cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem VII*, 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (521.61 sq. Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 603): “...not only must it be eliminated, but the strain as well (*magis autem non hec solum, sed et tensio*). Finally, when it has completed its course, the soul may rightly abide with the One. Having become single and alone in itself, it will choose only the simply One (*eliget solum le simpliciter unum*).”

⁷³ Deirdre Carabine, “A Thematic Investigation of the Neoplatonic Concepts of Vision and Unity”, *Hermathena*, no. 157, 1994, p. 49.

Proclus concludes the discourse about the One by moving towards the unspeakable – *indicibile*, τὸ ἄρρητον.⁷⁴ If the procedure of negation of negation were not initiated, the negative theologians “would arrive in the end at an empty space neatly fenced by negative dogmas, which is not at all where they want to be.”⁷⁵

While the soul cannot know the One, it can attain likeness to the One, experiencing its unity: the way of negation is the precondition for this, purifying the soul for the inflow of divine inspiration.⁷⁶

The Silence

Even if we submit to the idea that negations are more proper than affirmations, when we speak of the One, these too must be abandoned; for a negation is a type of proposition and, therefore, belongs to the same genus of discourse as the opposite affirmation. All negations are somewhat mixed with affirmations, as a negation always takes the form of an assertion in which something is negated of a particular thing. Due to this fact, even negations cannot be true of the One. To rest assured, it is better – when we speak of the One – to use negations rather than affirmations because they will not be so easily conducive to the error of imagining a certain “nature” or “essence” of the One. Strictly speaking, however, both affirmations and negations are entirely false when they are applied to the first principle. At the point when we ascend to the level beyond all knowledge and discourse, the fact of discriminating between truth and falsehood disappears. Thus, whatever we declare about the first principle – however ingenious our discursive strategies might be when using affirmations and negations – everything which is told is false; in this way, the principle of contradiction is suspended.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (520.42 Steel; cf. 264.695-696 Steel/Rumbach; trans. D. Gregory Maclsaac, in “The Final Section of Proclus’ Commentary on the Parmenides: A Greek Retroversion of the Latin Translation”, p. 265).

⁷⁵ See A.H. Armstrong, “On Not Knowing too much about God. The Apophatic Way of the Neoplatonists and other influences from Ancient philosophy which have worked against dogmatic assertion in Christian thinking”, in *Hellenic and Christian Studies*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1999, p. 137-138.

⁷⁶ See Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VI, 1094.22-1095.2 Cousin. Cf. R. Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction*, p. 58.

⁷⁷ Cf. C. Steel, “Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus’ *Parmenides* and the Origin of Negative Theology”, in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. M. Pickavé, Brill, Leiden, 2003, p. 596-597.

The last part of the seventh book from the *Commentary on Parmenides*⁷⁸ is crucial, as it guides the discussion about the negation in an “upward” direction, towards the level of the One:⁷⁹

But negative propositions (*abnegationes*) about the One do not really express anything *about* the One (*circa unum*). For nothing at all applies to it, either specifically or privatively (*priuatio*), but, as we have said, the name ‘one’ (*unum*) names our conception (*conceptus*) of it, not the One itself (*sed non ipsius unius*), and so we say that the negation (*abnegatio*) also is *about* (*circa*) our conception, and none of the negative conclusions (*abnegatiuarum conclusionum*) that have been stated is *about* the One, but because of its simplicity (*simplicitatem*), it is exalted above all contrast and all negation (*omni negatione*). So he rightly added at the end that these negative propositions (*abnegationes*) do not express anything *about* the One (*circa unum*).⁸⁰

Raoul Mortley emphasizes the decisive significance of this excerpt because we witness here the insertion of an asymmetry in the Proclean philosophy of negation. Firstly, it is said that “negative propositions do not really express anything about the One” – while they can work on inferior levels. Nevertheless, it is possible to formulate a negative statement about the One: such a negation would be nothing less than a linguistic phenomenon, applied rather to our conception of the One than to the One itself. Negations about the One are different from those pertaining to the intelligible or sensible realms and the inserted asymmetry turns into the difference

⁷⁸ The last section of Proclus’ *Commentary on the Parmenides* was preserved only in the Latin translation of William of Moerbeke (translated between 1280 and 1286). Klibansky – who discovered the work – and Labowsky published an edition and English translation of this work, *Parmenides usque ad finem primae Hypothesis nec non Procli Commentarium in Parmenidem pars ultima adhuc inedita interprete Guillelmo de Moerbeka ediderunt praefatione et adnotationibus instruxerunt* (*Plato Latinus*, Vol. III = *Parmenides, Proclus in Parmenidem*, eds. R. Klibansky and C. Labowski, Warburg Institutem, London, 1953). A critical edition of the Latin translation was published by Steel (*Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon*, 2 vols., ed. Carlos G. Steel, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 1982/1985). Of interest is the Greek retroversion, originally the work of Rumbach, corrected by Steel, and published along with an English translation by Gregory Maclsaac (“The Final Section of Proclus’ Commentary on the *Parmenides*: A Greek Retroversion of the Latin Translation”, eds. Carlos Steel and Friedrich Rumbach, trans. D. Gregory Maclsaac, in *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, VIII, 1997, Brepols, Turnhout, p. 216-267). This retroversion was revised in the more recent edition of Steel (*Procli In Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria* III, Libros VI - VII et Indices Continens, eds. Carlos Steel and Leen Van Campe, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009).

⁷⁹ See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 114 sq.

⁸⁰ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 70k Klibansky/Labowsky (518.72-79 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 600).

between “*de*” and “*circa*” in the Latin text: a declaration “*de uno*” is a declaration “referring to the One”, and a declaration “*circa unum*” is one that expresses something “about the One”;⁸¹ for Mortley,⁸² only the former is possible.⁸³

It would have been interesting to know how the Greek original looked on this point.⁸⁴ If we were, however, to juxtapose this text with a parallel excerpt,⁸⁵ we would find – contrary to our belief – that the equivalent of *circa* is not *περὶ*: “For our discourse is not, properly speaking, *on* the One (ἐπὶ τοῦ ἑνός), and as we advance we will hear the philosopher proving this: we nevertheless make some utterances *about* it (περὶ αὐτοῦ) through the natural anguish of the soul (τῆς ψυχῆς ὠδίῳ) *about* the One (περὶ τὸ ἕν).”⁸⁶

⁸¹ Syrianus also distinguishes between *referring to the One* and *talking about the One*. The construction with the genitive indicates a discussion where the noun in the genitive is the general subject matter, but does not imply anything about the subject matter. The construction with the accusative, however, indicates that something is being said about the subject matter in particular – such an accusative construction is, according to Syrianus, impossible when the “One” is the object in the accusative. See Sarah Klitenic Wear, *The Teachings of Syrianus on Plato’s Timaeus and Parmenides*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2011, p. 309–311.

⁸² See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 115.

⁸³ Negative propositions can *refer* to the One but they do not *express* anything about it: “*quare et dicte abnegationes non sunt circa unum, sed de uno*” (Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 70k.14–15 Klibansky/Labowsky). Cf. also Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 176.

⁸⁴ See *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 518.623–630 Steel/Rumbach (trans. D. Gregory Maclsaac, in “The Final Section of Proclus’ Commentary on the Parmenides: A Greek Retroversion of the Latin Translation”, p. 261): “But now, the negations belonging to the One (τοῦ ἑνός ἀποφάσεις) are not about the One (περὶ τὸ ἕν), for in general nothing is present to it, neither as Form nor as privation (στέρησις). Rather, just as we said that this name ‘One’ belongs to the conception in us, but not to the One itself, so likewise we say that negation (ἀπόφασις) also is about this conception, and none of the preceding negative (ἀποφατικῶν) conclusions are about the One itself; rather, it transcends all antithesis and all negation (πάσης ἀποφάσεως) on account of its simplicity. So then it is fitting that he appended to the end that these negations (ἀποφάσεως) are not ‘about the One’ (περὶ τὸ ἕν).”

⁸⁵ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 1191.5–9 Cousin.

⁸⁶ I preferred the translation of R. Mortley (*From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 115). Unfortunately, the translation of G.R. Morrow and J.M. Dillon fails to capture the shades that R. Mortley discusses, since both terms (ἐπὶ and περὶ) are rendered “about”: “For that in fact we say nothing in the proper sense *about* the One (ἐπὶ τοῦ ἑνός), we will hear the philosopher demonstrating a little later. Nevertheless, we do talk *about* it (περὶ αὐτοῦ) because of the natural striving of the soul *towards* the One (περὶ τὸ ἕν)” (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 539).

We generate language round about the One through the unsatisfied desire of our soul, but we cannot speak “on” the One: our language oscillates around the One, without really meeting it. Consequently, if we were to subscribe to the parallelism of the two mentioned texts, it would be inferred that the Latin “*de*” rather appears as the equivalent of the Greek “περὶ.” Indisputably, language “about” the One arises not from the ability to speak properly about it, but rather from the yearning to speak about it. Similarly, negations applied to the One must also be removed. The asymmetry resides in the relation of language to the reality: language grasps the inferior realities, but does not have any relation to the One. In this instance, we could distinguish a “psychological” explanation of the origins of language: it derives from the aspiration of the soul towards the One. In the first situation, we were given an ontological explanation: Proclus⁸⁷ asserts that the meaning of negation is determined by the thing which is applied to it – so that the different kinds of realities should be expressed by different varieties of negation.⁸⁸ But an attempted negative *about* the One could not possess such a reality which would determine its meaning.⁸⁹

The negative discourse removes one by one all the levels of existence with which our thinking operates, culminating in its own removal, in order to be understood that “not even the negative way of thinking can have direct access to the principle beyond being.”⁹⁰ Negations do not possess the ability to reveal the nature of the One: they lead to the transcendence of the principle.⁹¹

There are three levels of discursive removal with regard to the principle beyond being: firstly, the principle is denominated “the One”, knowing that the One is just a “negation of plurality” and that it does not directly imply the principle; secondly, the being of the One is removed,⁹² arriving at the conclusion that “the One is not even one”; and then, by means of the last question of the Hypothesis,⁹³ it is

⁸⁷ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 68k Klibansky/Labowsky (517.49-52 Steel; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 599).

⁸⁸ Such as: the privative one, etc.

⁸⁹ Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 115-116.

⁹⁰ Therefore, negations do not possess the capacity to reveal the nature of the One: they refer to the transcendence of the first principle. Cf. Marilena Vlad, *Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporias of the Ineffable Origin*, p. 265.

⁹¹ Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 176.

⁹² Plato, *Parmenides* 137c4.

⁹³ In Plato, *Parmenides* 142a6-8, the Parmenides character asks: “Is it possible that these things are so for the one?” (ἴδυνατόν οὖν περὶ τὸ ἐν ταῦτα οὕτως ἔχειν;), and the answer of the character Aristotle is a negative one: “I certainly don’t think so (Οὐκ οὖν ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ)” (trans. Mary Louise Gill and P. Ryan, in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. J.M. Cooper, p. 376). Proclus

claimed that *not even the negation* (the fact that “the One is not one”) is suitable to the first principle. Nonetheless, as Marilena Vlad notices, “the keystone of the Proclean interpretation concerning the apophatic discourse in the *Parmenides* is even more subtle than this necessary suppression of negations”. Proclus will question his own interpretation, according to which “the negations of the First Hypothesis generate the affirmations of the Second Hypothesis.”⁹⁴ Thus, “if the negations express the One’s power to generate the affirmations of the Second Hypothesis (corresponding to the whole level of being), then the last question of the First Hypothesis negates even the fact that the One should have this power to generate all things, thus placing the One *beyond* power, as it is *beyond* being (*i.e.*, beyond the things that exist, beyond generated things).”⁹⁵

Consequently, on one hand, the One generates all things, remaining transcendent to all the things which it generates; on the other hand, not even the power to generate all things can be properly attributed to it because it remains inexpressible and nothing can alter its transcendence: neither the fact that it generates all things nor the fact that we affirm that it generates all things.⁹⁶ If, in the first instance, the negations are more proper than the affirmations in regard to their application to the first principle – due to the fact that they make easier the access to the principle –, nonetheless, subsequently, even these negations must be removed.⁹⁷

notices that, although the argumentation starts from the hypothesis that “the one is” (137c4), it concludes in denying being to the One (141e9-12) and through the last question it is suggested that not even the negation of being from the One is appropriate to the first principle because even this suppression does not express anything about the One (see Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 70k Klibansky/Labowsky [518.72-79 Steel]; trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 600). However, this decoupling of being from the absolute One corresponds, in the Neoplatonic interpretation, precisely to the principle beyond being of *Respublica* 509b9. Therefore, it would seem that in the end of the First Hypothesis of Plato’s *Parmenides*, even “the fact of being *beyond being*” is repealed. “The ultimate expression of the principle beyond being seems to be that it is not even *beyond being*.” See Marilena Vlad, *Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporias of the Ineffable Origin*, p. 265.

⁹⁴ Corresponding to the entire level of *being*.

⁹⁵ Cf. Marilena Vlad, *Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporias of the Ineffable Origin*, p. 265-266.

⁹⁶ The One generates things, but it generates them by denying them (*i.e.*, remaining *transcendent* to them), and, ultimately, the mere fact that it generates them has to be denied (so that even this thing is not understood as a positive feature of the One).

⁹⁷ See Marilena Vlad, *Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporias of the Ineffable Origin*, p. 266-267.

The logic of transcendence determined us to transcend the logical principle, but not in order to begin “a new type” of discourse, using – this time – negation; in fact, neither the negations nor the affirmations can be used in reference to the One,⁹⁸ so that, as Mortley concludes, “*via negativa* has come to its natural terminus, not at the One, but at the next lowest level.”⁹⁹

We are faced with the situation of not having any more no linguistic instrument suitable for the supreme reality¹⁰⁰ and, at this point, the last part of Proclus’ *Commentary on Parmenides* is decisive.¹⁰¹

According to Proclus’ interpretation, Plato “removes (ἀφελεῖν) even the negations (τὰς ἀποφάσεις) and every account, wishing to conclude the argument on the One (περὶ τοῦ ἑνός) by moving towards the unspeakable (ἄρρητον);”¹⁰² “for by his denial he too removes (ἀφελεῖν) [all] of the negations (τὰς ἀποφάσεις). It is in silence (σιγή),¹⁰³ then, that he brings to completion the speculation about the One”¹⁰⁴ – *Nam per negari et ipse remouit abnegationes. Silentio autem conclusit eam que de ipso theoriam.*¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Negative statements do not have the ability to express anything about the One. Nothing applies to it in the proper sense: neither affirmation nor negation; it is beyond all opposition and negation: “sed exaltatum est propter simplicitatem ab omni oppositione et omni negation” (*In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 70k Klibansky/Labowsky [518.77-78 Steel]). Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena* p. 176. See also S. Lilla, “La teologia negativa dal pensiero greco classico”, *Helikon*, vol. 29-30, 1989-1990, p. 145 sq.

⁹⁹ R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁰ See Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.10 (63.18-64.9 Saffrey/Westerink). “There is nothing astonishing if in wanting to know the ineffable through discourse, one’s discourse is led into the impossible, for all knowledge which is applied to an object of knowledge which does not apply to it, destroys itself” – Καὶ θαυμαστόν οὐδὲν τὸ ἄρρητον τῷ λόγῳ γνωρίζειν ἐθέλοντας εἰς τὸ ἀδύνατον περιάγειν τὸν λόγον, ἐπεὶ καὶ πᾶσα γνῶσις τῷ μηδὲν αὐτῇ διαφέροντι γνωστῷ συναπτομένη τὴν ἑαυτῆς ἀπόλλυσι δύναμιν (*Theologia Platonica* II.10, 64.2-5 Saffrey/Westerink). Cf. Deirdre Carabine, “A Thematic Investigation of the Neoplatonic Concepts of Vision and Unity”, *Hermathena*, no. 157, 1994, p. 55, n. 26.

¹⁰¹ Cf. C. Steel, “*Negatio negationis*. Proclus on the final lemma of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*”, in *Traditions of Platonism. Essays in honour of John Dillon*, ed. J.J. Cleary, p. 363.

¹⁰² Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 74k Klibansky/Labowsky (cf. 520.695-696 Steel/Rumbach) (trans. D. Gregory MacIsaac, in “The Final Section of Proclus’ *Commentary on the Parmenides*: A Greek Retroversion of the Latin Translation”, p. 265).

¹⁰³ For a collection of citations from late ancient authors regarding silence (*sigē*), see S. Lilla, “La teologia negativa dal pensiero Greco classico a quello patristico e bizantino”, *Helikon*, vol. 31-32, 1991-1992, p. 32, n. 963.

¹⁰⁴ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 76k Klibansky/Labowsky (cf. 521.721-723 Steel/Rumbach; trans. D. Gregory MacIsaac, in “The Final Section of Proclus’ *Commentary on the Parmenides*: A Greek Retroversion of the Latin Translation”, p. 267).

¹⁰⁵ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 76k Klibansky/Labowsky (521.68-69 Steel). Cf. H.-D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, n. 4, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 116.

The model of the contemplation in silence (σιγή)¹⁰⁶ of the One is also confirmed by a fragment of the *Platonic Theology* II.9: “but we should celebrate in silence this ineffable nature and this perfectly causeless cause which is prior to all causes” – ...τῶν ὄντων οὔτε εἰ γεννητικόν, ἢ γινῶναι τοῖς δευτέροις θεμιτὸν ἢ λόγῳ διελεῖν, ἀλλὰ σιγῇ τὸ ἄρρητον αὐτοῦ καὶ πρὸ τῶν αἰτίων πάντων ἀναιτίως αἴτιον ἀνυμνεῖν.¹⁰⁷

There is here a reference to the “anguish” (ὠδισ)¹⁰⁸ of the soul, “which desires both to know and to speak to the One” – τῆ μὲν ὠδίνι τῆς ψυχῆς τῆ περὶ τὸν ἐνιαῖον θεὸν συγγνωστέον καὶ νοεῖν ἐκεῖνον,¹⁰⁹ and the anguish serves to generate words when, in fact, there should not be any. Silence is thus “the crowning of epistemological achievements”, after all the discursive acts were fulfilled, including the highest genre – negation.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ This silence is based on the Platonic dialogue *Timaeus* (28c4-5): “Now to find the maker and father of this universe [to *pan*] is hard enough, and even if I succeeded, to declare him to everyone is impossible” (trans. D.J. Zeyl, in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. J.M. Cooper, p. 1235), to which the interpretation of Proclus is added, in *Platonis Timaeum commentaria* I, 303.5-8 (ed. E. Diehl, B.G. Teubner, Leipzig, 1903): “The person who has found him is unable to tell this to others as he has seen it, for the discovery is not made by the soul who makes a statement, but by the soul who is initiated in and lies outstretched towards the divine light (πρὸς τὸ θεῖον φῶς), not moving with its own movement, but keeping its own silence as it were (οὐδὲ κινουμένης οἰκείαν κίνησιν, ἀλλὰ σιωπῶσης τὴν οἶον σιωπήν)” (trans. D.T. Runia and M. Share, in Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, vol. II, Book 2, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2008, p. 157). Cf. Proclus, *De providentia et fato et eo quod in nobis ad Theodorum mechanicum* 31.11 (ed. H. Boese, *Procli Diadochi tria opuscula*, De Gruyter, Berlin, 1960): ἀφθεγκτος γενομένη καὶ σιγήσασα τὴν ἔνδον σιγὴν. Cf. also H.-D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, n. 4, in Proclus, *Théologie Platonicienne*, livre II, p. 115-116. On the theme of silence in Proclus, see also A.H. Armstrong, “The Negative theology of Noûs in Later Neoplatonism”, in *Hellenic and Christian Studies*, no. 3, 1983, p. 34 sq.; W. Beierwaltes, *Proklos. Grundzuge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 366, n. 124.

¹⁰⁷ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II, 2.58.21-24 Saffrey/Westerink (trans. Saffrey/ Westerink, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 58). See also *Theologia Platonica* II.11, 65.13 Saffrey/Westerink (καὶ ὡς πάσης σιγῆς ἀρρητότερον). Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, p. 182.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 1115.32 Cousin (trans. Morrow/Dillon, in *Proclus Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 459).

¹⁰⁹ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II, 58.27-59.1 Saffrey/Westerink (trans. Saffrey/ Westerink, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 59).

¹¹⁰ It is interesting to note that, after the ascent “into this rarefied Himalayan atmosphere”, a *coup de grâce* is applied, which ends the progress of language: “negation finally dismisses itself”. See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation*, p. 116.

When we try to formulate propositions about what is ineffable, we should not be surprised if, by this effort, knowledge itself becomes impossible and needs to be dismissed.¹¹¹ Therefore, at the end of our dialectical approach to grasp the One through negations, we must abandon all inquiry, all questioning, “all knowledge and its instruments”, all discourse – even if it is only a negative discourse.¹¹²

The theme of silence is extremely important within the Proclean view of union with the One and it is reached only after intense striving and intellectual effort:

Nor is it at all wonderful that the discourse of those who wish to know the ineffable by words should terminate in that which is impossible; since all knowledge, when conjoined with an object of knowledge which does not at all pertain to it, loses its power – Καὶ θαυμαστόν οὐδὲν τὸ ἄρρητον τῷ λόγῳ γνωρίζειν ἐθέλοντας εἰς τὸ ἀδύνατον περιάγειν τὸν λόγον, ἐπεὶ καὶ πᾶσα γνώσις τῷ μηδὲν αὐτῇ διαφέροντι γνωστῷ συναπτομένη τὴν ἑαυτῆς ἀπόλλυσι δύναμιν.¹¹³

It is clear that silence is the natural conclusion of negative theology.¹¹⁴ The last pages of the *Commentary on Parmenides* are among the most innovative and profound. The way Proclus argues that all dialectical process – including the entire negative discourse – must be abandoned in favour of an experience of mystical union and silence has been admired and intensely highlighted by researchers.¹¹⁵

Moreover, Carlos Steel surprisingly advances his statement: “Proclus has no negative theology,¹¹⁶ if one means by this term a negative discourse whereby one indirectly expresses what the divine cause is: incorporeal, immobile, without time, without space, without division.”¹¹⁷ For Proclus, the path through dialectic is a

¹¹¹ Cf. Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.10, 2.64.2-9 Saffrey/Westerink.

¹¹² See Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.10, 2.63.18-64.9 Saffrey/Westerink. Cf. C. Steel, “Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus’ *Parmenides* and the Origin of Negative Theology”, in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. M. Pickavé, p. 597. Cf. also C. Steel, “*Negatio negationis*. Proclus on the final lemma of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*”, in *Traditions of Platonism. Essays in honour of John Dillon*, ed. J.J. Cleary, p. 363.

¹¹³ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* II.10, 2.64.2-5 Saffrey/Westerink (trans. Saffrey/Westerink, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 64).

¹¹⁴ H.-D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, n. 4, in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre II, p. 116.

¹¹⁵ See W. Beierwaltes, *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, p. 361-366. Cf. C. Steel, “*Negatio negationis*. Proclus on the final lemma of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*”, in *Traditions of Platonism. Essays in honour of John Dillon*, ed. J.J. Cleary, p. 364.

¹¹⁶ See also R. Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 54-62 (esp. p. 58 sq.)

¹¹⁷ C. Steel, “Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus’ *Parmenides* and the Origin of Negative Theology”, in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. M. Pickavé, p. 598.

preparation for the ultimate goal of unification.¹¹⁸ “For the unspeakable must be the end of all speech, and unification the end of knowing” – *Oportet enim esse finem sermonum quod indicibile et omnis cognitionem unionem*.¹¹⁹ In fact, the entire dialectical method, even if it operates by way of negations, is nothing but a preamble to the mystical union, removing whatever impedes the contemplation of the One.¹²⁰ “It is with silence, then, that he brings to the completion the study of the One.”¹²¹

The silence that is the consequence of removing all negations points beyond itself to the One who is beyond all silence.¹²²

Conclusion

Proclus confronts the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides* with the Fifth one and differentiates between the “Non-being” of the One and its specific negations, respectively, the “non-being” and the negation corresponding to Matter. The One is a Non-being “by excess”, and any addition pertaining to being would limit and diminish it, while Matter is a non-being “by defect” which tends to receive a form, to become a particular being. The negations of Matter indicate the privation of being, while the negations of the One denote the exceeding of being.

There are three kinds of negations: inferior negation refers to the being which is superior to non-being (as defect), the coordinated negation refers to the being which has the same rank as non-being and, finally, the type of negation superior to affirmation reflects the type of Non-Being which is beyond being.

It is better, when we speak of the One, to use negations rather than affirmations because they will not be so easily conducive to the error of imagining a certain “nature” or “essence” of the One. The negative discourse removes one by one all the levels of existence with which our thinking operates, culminating in its own removal, in order to be understood that not even the negative way of thinking can have direct access to the principle beyond being.

¹¹⁸ Deirdre Carabine, “A Thematic Investigation of the Neoplatonic Concepts of Vision and Unity”, p. 49.

¹¹⁹ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* VII, 520.43-44 Steel.

¹²⁰ C. Steel, “Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus’ *Parmenides* and the Origin of Negative Theology”, in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. M. Pickavé, p. 598.

¹²¹ This is the conclusion of the commentary on the First Hypothesis, coinciding with the end of the *Commentary to Parmenides*, as we know it. On dialectics as preparation of the soul, see Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* V, 993.36-994.12, 1015.38-41 Cousin.

¹²² Deirdre Carabine, “A Thematic Investigation of the Neoplatonic Concepts of Vision and Unity”, p. 49.

At the end of our dialectical approach to grasp the One through negations, we must abandon all inquiry, all questioning, all knowledge and its instruments, all discourse, even if it is only a negative discourse. The negation of negation is the one that introduces us in the appropriate state of silence.

The Proclean approach underlines the idea that negation is a form of language and it cannot be used further. Not so much is negation removed, but the entire language. We are faced with the situation of having exhausted all linguistic instruments suitable for the supreme reality.

Proclus concludes the discourse about the One by moving towards the unspeakable: silence is the natural conclusion of negative theology. Silence is thus “the crowning of epistemological achievements”, after all the discursive acts were fulfilled, including the highest genre – negation.

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES IN ROMANIA AND LITHUANIA

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ABSTRACT. Advance directives, a set of written instructions that a person gives that specify what actions should be taken for their health if they are no longer able to make decisions due to illness or incapacity, are a well-implemented tool in America, but few European countries have specific provisions about them in the law. Significant differences exist regarding the way advance directives are regulated and implemented between countries. The authors analyze the attitudes of several professional categories in Romania and Lithuania towards the advance directive using data obtained by conducting several interviews in Lithuania and a focus group in Romania. Both Romania and Lithuania are post-communist, now European Union member countries. All respondents thought that advance directives should be introduced in the law, but their social acceptance is expected to be low in Lithuania.

Keywords: *Advance directive; Romania; Lithuania; law*

Introduction

Advance directives are medical and legal tools that allow a person to express preference towards a certain type of healthcare in advance, should he/she become incompetent from a decision making point of view at some moment in time. Among the advantages of the advance directive we could mention that it prevents medical treatments or gestures that the person would not want in case of a terminal illness, permanent unconscious state, severe mental disability or coma and it does not represent a form of euthanasia. It also reflects the cultural and

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religious values of a person, his or her views on life quality and represents a way of enforcing patient dignity and autonomy at the end of life. The main disadvantages world literature recognizes are the fact that a patient may change his mind about what he has written in the advance directive, but have no time to update it, the risk of misinterpretation, since no advance directive can cover all potential situations; also, discussing an advance directive can be stressful for anyone; furthermore, there remains the question on where to store advance directives, how to know if a person admitted in an intensive care unit has one and exactly what is specified in that document.

There are two forms of advance directives. The *living will* provides specific directives about the course of treatment that is to be followed by health care providers and caregivers. In some cases a living will may forbid the use of various kinds of burdensome medical treatment, life support (such as hydration, feeding or the use of ventilators) or lifesaving (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) measures¹.

The *healthcare proxy* consists of appointing a representative (a trusted person) who can make decisions on behalf of the patient when he/she becomes unable of doing so. The healthcare proxy can assist the physician in choosing the best treatment alternative according to provisions of the living will or can shed light over confusing provisions of the living will. The designated person must be well acquainted with the moral and religious values of the patient. The proxy is usually a family member or a friend.

These forms of advance directives may exist at the same time, as they complete each other. The advance directive may be modified at any point, if the patient is still competent to make decisions.

Although advance directives were first introduced the United States of America in 1969² and by 2007 41% of Americans had one³, this tool still does not exist in some European countries.

The legislative situation of advance directive in Romania and Lithuania

Romania and Lithuania are both post communist countries. Romania joined NATO on March 29th, 2004 and the European Union on January 1st, 2007, whereas Lithuania became a full member of NATO and the European Union in the spring of 2004 and a member of the Schengen Agreement on December 21st, 2007.

After the fall of Ceaușescu regime in December 1989, Romania started a reform process in all areas, including healthcare. A similar process started in Lithuania in 1990, when the country gained its independence from the Soviet Union. Healthcare

reforms included articulating patient and healthcare providers' rights and obligations. Both countries have ratified the Oviedo Convention, that states that "The previously expressed wishes relating to a medical intervention by a patient who is not, at the time of the intervention, in a state to express his or her wishes shall be taken into account" (article 9), but have not enacted any specific laws or provisions on advance directives. This represents the legal ground on which advance directives laws or law provisions should be built on. The Oviedo Convention also protects human autonomy by regulating informed consent and consent by proxy for incapable persons (articles 5-8)⁴.

In both Romania and Lithuania there are no laws or official statements directly related to advance directive.

In Romania, the law no. 46/2003 regarding the patient's rights, stipulates that the patient has the right to refuse or to stop a medical intervention by assuming responsibility in writing, but the doctor must make sure to explain the consequences of such an action to a competent, conscious patient. Mentally disabled persons, if able, are also asked for consent to treatment; if unable to give consent, informed consent is required from the family (Mental Health Law 487/2002, republished in 2012)⁵. Law 95/2006 and the Medical Deontology Code also protect human autonomy and consent, but state nothing about advance directives.

In emergency situations, if the medical personnel is aware of previously expressed wishes of the patient, those must be taken into consideration. In case such information is unavailable for an incompetent patient in an emergency situation, the consent of the family or medical representative is no longer necessary. In non-emergency situations involving incompetent patients, the consent of the medical representative is sought, but the patient must also be involved in the decision making process to the extent of his understanding capability. This also applies to children, whose assent must be sought, and whose opinions must be taken into consideration in medical care.

In case healthcare suppliers and medical representatives cannot reach common ground, the decision is made by an arbitrage committee, consisting of three doctors for patients admitted in hospitals and two doctors for ambulatory patients.

All patients are entitled to terminal medical care in order to die with dignity⁶.

In Lithuania the recommendations on advance directives are only provided by Lithuanian Association of Physicians, which adopted (translated and published) The World Medical Association Statement on Advance Directives ("Living Wills") by the WMA General Assembly, Helsinki 2003. However, the advance directives are not officially integrated into the medical decision-making process in this country⁷.

The right of patient self-determination and its limits are regulated by the Law on Patients rights and the Law of Mental Health.

In Lithuania, the competent patient's consent is also needed in non-emergency situations. On the other hand, the patient's consent is not needed if he/she is unconscious or if his/her will cannot be known for another reason and a serious threat is being posed to his life or health. In this case, emergency medical assistance is offered without the patient's or his/her legal representative's consent.

In cases where there is a disagreement between the doctor and the medical representative, the medical ethics commission of the health care institution or the Committee for Medical Ethics of Lithuania has the right to give consent for the treatment that is considered to be in the best interest of the patient. The administration of the health care institution or the treating physician have the right to appeal to this commission or committee.

A minor patient must be informed about the treatment and, with his age and level of development permitting a correct appraisal of the status of his health and proposed course of treatment (the treating physician shall decide this), the minor may not be treated against his will, unless provided otherwise by the Republic of Lithuania laws. The physician shall select the methods of treatment which would best suit the interests of the minor⁷.

Methodology

We have conducted a qualitative research in Romania and Lithuania aiming to assess the opinions of different categories of professionals regarding the relevance of the advance directives and the need for such an instrument in the two countries.

In Romania we organized a focus group with 10 specialists in bioethics, theology, psychology, medicine and law in Cluj, at the Center of Bioethics of Babes-Bolyai University.

In Lithuania we conducted 12 interviews with Lithuanian bioethicists in Vilnius and Kaunas Universities.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to ensure consistency across participants.

The interview and focus group guide included open-ended questions grouped in the following topics:

- Views on the usefulness and advantages of the advance directive
- Views on the risks associated with the advance directive
- Views on how to draft and implement a law introducing advance directives in Romania and Lithuania
- Views on the probability of the population to consider such a tool adequate in the current socio-economic and cultural environment of Romania and Lithuania.

The interviews and the focus group were tape-recorded, typed and reviewed for accuracy. Transcripts of the interviews were compiled and then the phenomenological analysis was applied, aiming to identify the common views of the respondents, but also specific features.

Results and discussions

The results are partly presented as condensed descriptions of data, partly by quotations that are considered illustrative.

Both Romanian and Lithuanian professionals had all heard before participating in the focus group about the advance directive, but most of them only knew about them in the limited form of do-not-resuscitate orders.

The utility of such a document was clear to all Romanian participants. Physicians and lawyers were most in favor of this tool and their opinion was that it would help to solve many “borderline” cases:

“I say it would be good from all points of view! Not for the quality of life, but for the dignity [of the patient], that cannot be measured, and each of us defines it by his own cultural system. It would be good for the health system itself, for the social system as well.” (doctor, Cluj focus group)

All the interviewed Lithuanian experts also agreed that the advance directive is a useful tool:

“I think advance directives is one of the best tools to protect a person’s dignity in such situations.” (bioethicist, Vilnius University)

Our results are in line with other studies which have shown almost uniformly positive opinions among patients and physicians regarding the *concept* of advance directives (Emanuel⁸, Joos⁹) but the opinions of other professional categories were not as widely investigated.

The advantages of the advance directives that were highlighted by Romanian participants were: “reducing the physician’s psychological stress”, less conflicts between the family and the physician and placing the decision in each patient’s hands. However, some of the specialists suggested that not all members of the Romanian society seem to be ready to take matters into their own hands.

“We live in a society that does not teach us to live in a system and to be independent. We are educated to live in families where the man makes every decision and the woman does not work and is totally dependent until old age, where children are not taught to make decisions and to be on their own by the time they turn fourteen”. (social worker, Cluj focus group)

This is also the situation in Lithuania, where the fear of responsibility among the patients is acknowledged:

-“Many people don’t want to know about their diagnosis, their treatment; they just want to be healthy and ok.
-So they don’t want to take responsibility for their own life?
-Yes.” (bioethicist, Vilnius University)

Lithuanian experts identified several advantages of advance directives: they provide “legal clarity”:

“When a patient’s will is not known and family members sometimes are in disagreement how to treat such a patient, sometimes it leads to the legal cases”. (lawyer and bioethicist, Vilnius)

Second,

“relatives do not need to make very difficult decisions in very difficult situations” (nurse, bioethicist, Vilnius). Third, “if you base your views on autonomy, it’s the way to implement autonomous decision making”. (doctor, bioethicist, Vilnius)

The economical factor also came up in one interview:

“For patients who would not agree to have this artificial ventilation or other stuff... the money would be saved and could be used to help other patients”. (doctor, bioethicist, Kaunas)

Yet literature describes cases where patient decisions are not always made autonomously even in the process of drafting advance directives. Klessig¹⁹ and others found that the preeminence of patient autonomy is far from universal. Considerations such as religious beliefs, suspicions about the medical establishment, familial obligations, and respect for authority all entered the patients’ preferences.

Lithuanian participants also identified certain disadvantages of this document:

“In case the family has certain interests... like inheriting something... I wonder if such legislation would not make such situations easier for that family” (doctor, bioethicist, Vilnius).

Concerns were also expressed about being able to modify the document at some point by the patient, should he change his mind and about “reducing medical care to simple technical aspects”. (doctor, Cluj focus group)

The Romanian specialists mentioned also that another disadvantage of advance directive would be imposing limitations to the doctor’s professional autonomy:

“A risk would be limiting the doctor’s professional autonomy, in case he wants to act” (lawyer, Cluj focus group).

In Lithuania people do not seem to have a lot of trust in the healthcare system, therefore one expert’s opinion was that people might fear completing this document:

“I think a lot of people don’t trust the healthcare system. I can’t say exactly why, because the reasons are very complex. Maybe it is because of this post-communist countries situation... nobody trusts other people... it’s a problem.” (philosopher, bioethicist, Vilnius)

This line of thought was taken even further:

“Also there are some people who are very conservative and who associate advance directives with euthanasia, and especially those who follow catholic traditions. Because... it depends on how you define euthanasia. I think there can be some kind of misconception between these two... advance directives and euthanasia”. (doctor, bioethicist, Vilnius)

Outdated provisions of the advance directive were seen as risky in both countries:

“To what extent a decision already made can be modified... that needs to be discussed” (doctor, Cluj focus group).

“Sometimes technologies develop and if you have this advance directive signed like... very long ago, you could already have some new treatment options available.”(doctor, bioethicist, Vilnius), “And, of course, sometimes there can be the risk that patient’s mind has changed. And he didn’t update it”. (doctor, bioethicist, Kaunas)

The risk of misinterpretation was acknowledged by all the participants:

“I think sometimes doctors can interpret advance directives differently if they are not very precise and having in mind that many clinical situations can be different...” (nurse, bioethicist, Vilnius).

In Romania the risk of misinterpretation was discussed while talking about what the actual form should look like:

“I think classical situations should be included, like... where would you like to be cared for, at home, or in the hospital...”

-So it would be best to adopt the western check- box type?

-Yes, standard type. Because otherwise it could be interpretable and it may lead to abuse. It should have a formal structure, it should be standard, but it should also include the possibility to add something personal” (doctor, Cluj focus group)

One Lithuanian expert said that advance directives should only be allowed in terminal situations, or else “you can imagine some vicious scenarios.” (doctor, bioethicist, Vilnius)

The disadvantages mentioned by the Romanian and Lithuanian specialists are also discussed in the literature. However, many other important disadvantages of advance directives such as the difficulty of their implementation, due to the complexity of the documents^{11,12}, the failure of physicians to initiate discussions¹³, the difficulty in understanding discussions¹⁴, the perceived ill-effects on patients of having such discussions¹⁵, and logistical issues such as the optimal time to initiate discussions about advance care planning^{16,17} were not acknowledged by the participants in our study, showing either their incomplete knowledge about this issue or their opinion that the above mentioned issues are not a real problem.

Romanian experts agreed that Romanians would accept to have advance directives stipulated in the law, but probably few would actually complete one, because “In a normal family, it is out of the question. The patient places his life in the hands of family members”(priest, Cluj focus group).

The situation was different in Lithuania:

“In Lithuania it would be very problematic to legislate this because we are a catholic country and in the field of bioethics the church has the impact on making decisions.” (lawyer, bioethicist, Vilnius)

Another expert stated that many people in Lithuania would probably like to have such an institute of advance directive, because it is an expression of their autonomy, “but also there are some people who are very conservative and who associate advance directives with euthanasia, and especially those who follow catholic traditions.”(doctor, bioethicist, Vilnius)

Experts in both countries identified a common fear:

“Anyways, in Romania, patient’s biggest fear is that, when they are admitted into hospitals, they are not treated enough, not that they are over treated”.
(doctor, Cluj focus group)

One expert in Lithuania followed the same line of thought:

“Now the question is how much this over treatment decisions are prevalent in a country which is not very rich so I think that would be an interesting question to see how would the advance directives be applied to different scenarios in, let’s say, transition country and the wealthiest state where everything is done up to the very last intervention available”. (doctor, bioethicist, Vilnius)

Conclusions

Experts in Romania and Lithuania were all in favor of introducing legal provisions on advance directive, which it is considered an extensions of the patient’ autonomy. The risk of misinterpretation was identified by all respondents, but the advantages of this legal tool surpass the risks. Lithuanian experts consider the very conservative nature of their culture and the strong involvement of the Church in the decisions as limiting factors for acceptance of the advance directives, which seem to be associated by the public at large with euthanasia. Romanian experts, in turn, saw written advance directives futile in normally functioning families, where patients can easily choose a proxy to talk to, but thought that society would agree to have a law regulating them.

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METAPHYSICS, ABSOLUTE AND THE HOMONIMY OF THE NEGATIVE. PROLEGOMENA FOR A SPECULATIVE LOGIC.¹ PART II²

HORAȚIU MARIUS TRIF-BOIA*

ABSTRACT. Our paper addresses eight main and traditional issues of Philosophy: the issue of speculative logic; the issue of the fundamental premises of existence and thinking — which engages on the path of absolute ontological reduction; the issue of absolute Nothingness revealed as the ultimate result of the previous reduction; the issue of the realness and effectiveness of Nothingness; the issue of ontological Difference; the issue of the consistency and apodicticity of metaphysics; the issue of the nature of the Absolute; and the issue of the Ontological Argument. The results that we gained at the end of our work show that the ontological Ground is the Absolute and that the Absolute is the transcendent instance of immediate identity of irreducible opposites. This instance is consistent with the traditional claims of philosophical and theological metaphysics and it supports the Ontological Argument through the overcoming of the formal logic principles.

Keywords: *speculative logic, theological metaphysics, Hegelianism, Ontological Argument, undetermined immediateness*

1.1 The transcendental appearance of ontological relativism (continued)

The idea of infinite recurrence or infinite hierarchies or scalar ontology — “the great chain of being” (Lovejoy, 1936/1997, p. 50-84) or “Behemoth” (Florenski,

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² The present article is the second part of our two-part study entitled *Metaphysics, the Absolute and the Homonymy of the Negative. Prolegomena for a Speculative Logic. Part I*, **Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, *Philosophia***, 63, no. 3 (2018), pp. 163-188, DOI:10.24193/subbphil.2018.3.08.

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1929/1999, p. 26-27), as it is known in the old traditions that, however, *did not support the ontological autonomy of string determinations* — is based on three concepts: **a.** the entire sphere of the real is made up of an infinite string of interdependent elements; **b.** the elements determine one another in a certain order or hierarchy; **c.** there is no absolute or irreducible ontological foundation or reality, no totality of the sphere of the real that would represent an univocal and absolute principle of this multiple; the states, influences and conditionings etc. both of any element and the string depend entirely on the context or on the particular, even singular, perspective of the element taken into consideration.

All of these mean that: 1. there is no actuality of the string or series; 2. the model of the string is pure possibility; 3. this pure possibility is reducible to Nothingness because of the string's impossibility and of all its levels; 4. the string is self-contradictory, since it is postulated as being "absolutely relative" — a concept which is a contradiction in terms on its own. This contradiction is non-speculative, because specularity means exhaustive totality through difference. Yet, in a string of this type, as we will demonstrate, totality, exhaustion and difference are all rejected.

1. The non-actuality of the string results from the absolute progressive infinite dependence of each level or element on the preceding ones. Since there is no unrelative or unconditional identity that would provide an irreducible ontological basis to the string or to any of its elements, or a simultaneous and unmediated absolute infinite actualisation for the string's multiple, every moment or determined level of the string must, in fact, be actualised independently of the others and of any other possible instance. But then it would no longer be a string. Moreover, the actuality of every element would be infinitely delayed, i.e., delayed to the infinite number of levels or elements conditioning it. For, in order for the element or level x to be actualised, it is necessary that, previously, x^∞ elements should have been already actualised (where $x > 1$),³ considering that every element out of x^∞ elements, and x^∞ itself, are affected by the same non-actualisation or infinite conditionality. In other words, an infinite conditionality would lead to an infinite delay, which directly leads to the concept of ontological impossibility or pure ontological blockage.

2. It is not difficult to note that the model according to which this infinity of strings should be actualised is that of infinite progression. The only problem would be that, without an already given principle of actualisation, no progression can be actualised by virtue of the infinity of steps that need to be undertaken for each individual level. The objection against approaching the limit, which Zeno of Elea raised against

³ Conversely, to demonstrate reduction, we can mathematically suggest the infinity of the string that must be previously actualised through the formula: $\left(\frac{1}{x}\right)^\infty$, where $x > 1$.

infinite movement in his famous logical and mathematical paradoxes, returns in full force. — In order for A to be constituted, it is necessary for A' to have been constituted; in order for A' to be constituted, it is necessary for A'' to have been constituted; in order for A'' to be constituted, it is necessary for A''' to have been constituted etc., *ad infinitum*. One cannot escape pure possibility precisely because of the infinite suspension of the origin's foundation point, a point infinitely delayed or blocked.⁴

⁴ Some authors claim that, after the discovery and development of mathematical analysis and differential calculus, the issue raised by the Eleatic paradoxes has been solved. (Seife, 2000/2010, p. 49-52) The invention of the mathematical void (\emptyset), and its scoring in the numerical set through 0 would be responsible for this progress, so that the divisibility of determined being would still be able to reach its limit through its instantaneous reduction to void or zero. This occurs under the conditions in which, as is well known, Greek thought in general and Eleatic thought in particular “abhorred the vacuum” in ontology and indetermination in general, for which reason they did not conceive Being as having any point of absolute ontological discontinuity in itself — an indispensable condition for the infinite divisibility (of determined being) discussed in Zeno's paradoxes.

We believe that, although the introduction of the concept of terminality in mathematics led to explaining the existence of determination and quanta, however this concept should be approached metaphysically. Otherwise, it risks becoming a limitative condition indicating a speculative blockage. As a prerequisite to any progression, thus to any change, the void represents an immediate terminal point of cancellation, thus limiting or blocking any elementary formation. If it remains at this level, one can no longer understand how both the inter-elementary translation and the interaction among noetic components can occur (“How can 0 be overcome in the numerical string?” or “How can elements which are separated by \emptyset be engaged in a mutual relation?”), be they mathematical, logical or of any other conceptual nature. But the very original formation of any first, original element remains obscure and is threatened by the irrepressible and invincible spectre of arbitrariness which would compromise any kingdom of Logos. One can only add to this the fact that any determined being, taken in its pure abstraction, in its pure ontological presence, is participating in Being and, being founded by the latter, there is no reason why the concept of infinite divisibility could not thus be reinstated, even if the possibility of exhaustiveness in a void is accepted — a thesis that could be assessed only at the closure of the present text. This would imply that, essentially, a creature cannot be un-created, or, at any rate, not through infinite progressive divisibility; and that, in fact, it is erroneous to call a creature “finite”. Everywhere in nature we would encounter the infinite, not the absolute one, but the determined infinite or infinite in its genus. Following Leibniz, who claimed that he could no longer see finite objects anywhere in the world, G. Cantor argues, after developing his theory explained in *Mannigfaltigkeitslehre*, that human intellect was structurally formed in the horizon of infinity which is, anyway, inherent to it (Becker, 1954/1968, p. 322-328). Moreover, in Zeno's paradoxes, it is the very infinite divisibility of Being that is rejected by rejecting the fundamental condition of this divisibility: the realness of Nothingness, of the Void as it was postulated by the atomists. Consequently, rejecting the Void did not result, as some mistakenly believed, in the infinite divisibility of Being (a consequence seen as disastrous and unacceptable by the Eleates in particular and the Greeks in general), but in the immediate completeness of its unity. Essentially, the contradiction revealed by the Eleatic paradoxes is the one between the atomists' postulate of the Void, of Nothingness as foundation, on the one hand, which implies the **terminality of determinate being**, from which some would derive its very *finite* nature, and on the other, the infinite progression of division, which means precisely the **uncircumscription of determinate being**, i.e., its *infinity*.

3. The entire string of the infinite “ladder” or infinite becoming is impossible even if, through a miraculous occurrence, it would be actualised, as some scholars conceived it, postulating a circular interconditionality in a loop of determined elements. — As G. Priest paralogistically believes (Priest, 2002/2007, p. 62). (Priest’s second thesis for the elimination of Aristotelian *prime matter*, which argues that at the zero level of substance one would have an entity that would represent the coincidence between form and matter, is nothing more than either a paralogism, or the thesis of the Actual Infinity itself.) — In other words, once actualised, this “ladder” would fall apart in

However, the problem is that going from Being (even understood as determinate being) to Nothingness (or unbeing) constitutes the very absolute passage between contradictory concepts. Accomplishing such a passage is impossible through *progression*, as the atomists claimed, because no matter how fragmented Being (determinate being) would be, we would still be on its territory. Overcoming it in favour of Nothingness or unbeing would require an absolute shortcut, an absolute exhaustion of traversing the Being, its integral totality, an absolute qualitative leap in order to find its limit. In other words, this overcoming should have already been given, already been accomplished. This, once more, implies the specularity of exhaustion only encountered in the concept of actual infinity.

Overcoming Being or determinate being would practically mean that Nothingness or non-being is already given (Hegel, 1966, p. 63-65). Moreover, this immediate apprehension of the two concepts of Being and Nothingness only occurs from an outside third perspective that encompasses both. Videlicet, only when we have overcome and preserved a concept (in Hegel’s words, *Aufhebung*) will that concept prove its effectiveness. Once overcome, its entire infinite inner essence is contained and apprehended; i.e., it is infinitely actual. Until the concept is not overcome and we are still in its conceptual territory from which we cannot escape, the infinity of its essence is still determined and strictly, narrowly potential, thus ineffective and impotent.

Conversely, we will also see that Being’s or determinate being’s synthesis, namely the ontological founding of *the something*, presumes an absolute result of exhaustiveness: that of the Nothing itself in this case. Nothingness must be overcome too so that the founding of the origin point of *something’s* inception can occur: this implies the same exhaustiveness. However, this result will be further investigated below and we will see that it was not possible for it to emerge until the development of Christianity’s Trinity doctrine, because it requested as prerequisite the absolute ontological transfiguration of the Negative.

To summarize the situation of the Eleatic paradox in a new approach, hereby exposed: the infinite divisibility of determinate being is real, but it is achievable (i.e., determinate being can be terminally and exhaustively divided) only if the absolute of Nothingness is given both as its boundary and as suppression of its boundary. Thus, determinate being reveals itself, simultaneously, as infinite in its essential infinitely divisible inwardness or an inwardness with an infinite variation; and as completed, finished, even as something that can be overcome, apprehended, contained, but only if the exhaustive nullification through its reduction is admitted. — If Nothingness is not real, then escaping the essence or inwardness of a concept is also not real and thought remains a prisoner of conceptual monism. — Thus we see now that ancient metaphysics was blocked by the impossibility of the occurrence of the actual infinity (either by postulating the potential one as a real foundation in Aristotle’s version, or by postulating the abstract, separate, thus ineffective, transcendence of the Principle — *nulla est fluxorum scientia* — in the Platonic and neo-Platonic versions) (Octavian, 2003, p. X-XI, 40-48).

the same instant, on account of the fact that the elements cannot support one another mutually or scalarly in the absolute, even when their system would be circular. Let us not forget the third fundamental postulate of this system (the most important one): no absolute totality, no pure unity, no identity transcending the elements of the string is given. If this were the case, then element A, for instance, would have to causally and/or ontologically support element B succeeding it; and this, in turn, would have to support element C and so on. But this implies that element A has an endpoint, a limit, a negation in order to allow a transition to element B. But we find ourselves in the situation in which, once A reached its endpoint,⁵ as we are forbidden from postulating a form of indeterminate identity, which is actually, infinitely and absolutely transcendent and common to A and B, one can no longer see how the transition to B would be possible. The endpoint of A would result in an absolute ontological chasm or, better said, in an absolute meontological chasm. Certainly, one possible objection would be that there could appear an immediately superior and determined level between A and B, hierarchically superior to A and B, say A', which is responsible for the community between A and B and thus of their communicability. So A' would ontologically supplant the presupposed lack of difference between A and B and would insure the transition from A to B. But the string is only an infinite succession of elements without an absolute transcendent identity, such that A' would find itself in the exact same situation as A and B, both in itself, as it would postulate an absolute synthesis of opposites under the conditions of its own determination or circumscription; as much as in relation to another element, say B', towards which it would be supposed to make its transition. If, here too, we were to postulate a new hierarchic level superior to A' and B', namely A'', which would be responsible for the community between A' and B', we would merely import the problem to this new level. Then, a new postulate of a new superior level would import the problem to the new level, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Thus, we would return to the problem of the string's actuality that, as can be seen, suffers from an infinite impossibility of transposing the actuality of the string from one level to another, regardless of what level and towards which direction. In short, the entire transposition of the string's actuality from one level to another would once again be reduced to pure possibility. But, since pure possibility is itself precisely this kind of formation of progressive actualisation strings, and since it is itself a perpetual delay of the origin point or "bridgehead" of the first element that must be infinitely constituted and actualised from an infinity of elements in an infinite number of steps; and since these elements

⁵ We note here a tacit self-contradiction: even though ontological relativism does not acknowledge absolute terminality, it still puts forward the absolute difference (i.e., the absolute terminality) of the string's elements.

are also conditioned by other infinities of elements through other infinities of steps etc. etc., the result is that **pure possibility (*Nihil privativum*)**, taken on its own, without any external actualisation principle, without any other active exterior actual agent that would instantiate these privative infinities through an actual infinite, is in fact pure impossibility, i.e., purely **Nothingness, *Nihil negativum***. The pure possible taken on its own, absolutely in itself, reveals to be nothing else but the pure Impossible.⁶

4. We are shown here the reasons why postulating relativity as absolute is not only a contradiction in linguistic terms, but an ontologically reflected contradiction: i.e., it is impossibility in itself. It is not by accident that the propositions that resume the liar's paradox in various forms — "I am lying" — in order to attempt the accreditation of an absolute bending of all criteria — "Everything is relative", "The truth is relative", "There is no absolute truth", "There is no absolute", "Everything is subject to interpretation", "It is forbidden to forbid" etc. etc. — all fall into the ontological chasms of foundational, metaphysical sophisms. When one believes that determination can immediately take the place of indetermination, or that the occurrence can immediately replace its actuality principle, or that a part, strictly speaking, can immediately stand in for the whole, we are already dealing with a paradox, in the best case scenario;⁷

⁶ This is the moment when potentialist (i.e., relativist) thought also brings forth its objection: after the emergence of this disjunction between determined elements, of this pure chasm of absolute negative that separates the elements in a final, absolute discontinuity, how can one still postulate the existence, the being, the synthesis of *the something*? How could one overcome this chasm, what sort of bridge or bridgehead could there exist to escape the abyss of complete suppression? Wouldn't relativity, potentiality, relation be preferable to such a ruthless suppression? The answer can only be negative: one cannot build castles and fortresses on sand. And the answer's negativity must be subject to metaphysical exhaustiveness: it is precisely *in the chasm, in the abyss, in the negative, in the impossible* that the redeeming answer is found. As we have anticipated in a previous note, this answer is related to the issue of ontological and ideal transfiguration of the negative itself; only Christianity opened up this horizon.

⁷ The paradox of the relationship between the whole and its parts is one of the most compelling cases for the justification of speculative thought, as it illustrates the unity of opposites: one-multiple, principle-occurrence, general-individual, universal-singular, identity-difference, whole-parts. Regardless of whether one speaks about the equipotence between the set of semicircles and that of diameters, already noted by Proclus, or of the equipotence between the cardinal of \mathbb{N} and the cardinals of \mathbb{Z} , \mathbb{Q} or \mathbb{R} , etc. (Becker, 1954/1968, p. 303-308, 338-347, 355-359; Munteanu, 1999, p. 18-19), the logical and mathematical paradoxes reflect apodictically and eminently the need to overcome formal thought which is foundationally self-contradictory. But this cannot be accomplished in whatever way. The sophistry we reject here is not synonymous with speculative thought, precisely because it does not assume everything that results from the concepts it postulates. When the results contradict the premises, instead of undertaking the reappraisal of all elements, including those initially rejected, sophistry unequivocally manifests arbitrarily selective tendencies. — In the present case, rejecting transcendence or absolute identity — probably based on an initial naive inclination to preserve the thought apparently outside the possibilities of contradiction, videlicet, to preserve formalism —;

but when one postulates that the indeterminate, the principle or the whole itself does not even exist, then the paradox falls into sheer unspeculative self-contradiction,⁸ and the sophistic aberration is complete.

— If one claims that “everything is relative” or that “there is no absolute truth”, four simultaneous self-contradictions occur that unequivocally and immediately cancel the proposition that has just been stated:

1. (from an ontological standpoint) any criteria that would distinguish the relative from the non-relative so as to provide us with the evidence that (absolute) truth does not exist, immediately vanishes.

2. (from an ontological standpoint) the relativist statement itself is also part of “everything”; but if this “everything” is relative, then the relativist statement is also relative, thus false, null. But then, if “everything is relative” is null, the consequence is that there is at least one thing that is not relative.

3. (from the perspective of the premises’ criterion of truth) one cannot aim for the truth of a relativist statement unless one accepts that truth exists *a priori* (prerequisite to the articulation of the relativist statement), therefore not everything is relative. Thus, one already presumes that there is (an absolute) truth.

4. (from the perspective of the consequences’ criterion of truth) in the very same instant when one claims to cancel absolute truth, one also claims that a relativist statement possesses absolute truth. Therefore, in addition to the fact that a relativist statement already presupposes the premise of (absolute) truth, it also immediately reclaims and reinstates it through its very cancellation.

Finally, some could see an objection in the self-contradictory circularity of the *liar’s paradox* (let us recall it: if one supposes that the statement “I am lying” is false, then its content expresses precisely its falsity, thus the statement claiming it is consequently true; but, since the statement is now presumed to be true, then its content tells us precisely the truth about the statement, namely that the statement is false, thus the final conclusion of the entire statement is that it is true because it is false and it is false because it is true). The objection would argue that, since the statement is undecidable from the standpoint of formal logic, one could thus invoke the very postulate of relative circularity as absolute within this very case. But here one would commit a transcendental illusion: the level of the intellect that detects the formal blockage would be mistaken for the level of the reason that detects the

this results in an even more serious dead end, entirely deprived of any solution, manifested through a self-contradiction of which one expects escaping either by abandoning it, either by arbitrariness. In other words, a self-contradiction that is thus inescapable.

⁸ The fundamental condition of speculation is precisely the effective realness of the totality or of indeterminacy or of the whole.

statement's discursive universe. And the discursive universe of the formal circular self-contradiction "I am lying" also presupposes the same truth or principle of identity: every time the statement oscillates between false and true, one presupposes the statement has a true meaning (as true or false or as true and false); and its self-contradictory content also falls under absolute speculative identity: it is self-contradictory. —

Concerning the relation between the elements of a string, respectively the mutual position of elements that should be in continuity with one another, Aristotle wrote in *Metaphysics*, XI, 1069a that continuity appears between two elements when

I say that things are continuous when the boundary of each of them, by which they are in contact and held together, is one and the same, so that clearly continuity occurs in those things from which it is natural for some unity to arise by virtue of their contact. (Aristotle, 2007, p. 428 — *trans. apud* Aristotle, 1998, p. 350)

It is evident that here the elements that come in a continuum have continuity by means of the limit that simultaneously separates and unites them. This presupposes or implies the very third-party position ("something unique") of absolute totality, of pure uniqueness, of transcendent identity of the string's elements. The elements cannot touch each other in the absence of such community, since the limit (which is already irrational or super-rational in itself) would have to be completely impenetrable not only between the two elements, but also in their internal reduction, completely suppressing their internal consistency. For the parts that make up these entities too are also clearly marked off one against the other. Moreover, if we speak about macroscopic things, we see that the limit between them is maintained even when they touch, otherwise they would have to directly interpenetrate their substances. Even when the palm of one's hand is laid on the table and perceives its physical properties, there still is an absolute limit between the palm and the table preserved in an absolute distinction between the two elements; in the empiric sphere, this distinction is given as a physical potentiality. — On a microscopic or quantic level, this potentiality becomes ontological, because particles can fuse together under certain circumstances and between certain limits, which proves that here potentiality is, however, not pure, but still a determined one. Yet, neither pure Potentiality could eliminate the original ontological disjunction, since Potentiality in itself is the external overlapping between Being and Nothingness.

Resuming, then, the question of ontological foundation, it is unveiled that the first step that *representation-thought* can take to speak about foundation can only be the meontological one: the only place it reaches is **Nothingness** (Hegel, 1966, p. 10; Hegel, 2000a, p. 41). In order to see this result, we are left with no choice but to

resume the issue of the infinite string of elements, but regressively, in the opposite direction.

1. Thus, a certain element, a being, A, is given. A is composed of the “quantum” of being (let us call it A’) and of the ontological differences and negations that determine it, i.e., separate it from other elements and separate its properties and sides from one another.

2. We focus our attention on A’, namely on the positive content elements, respectively the “quanta” of positive predications pertaining to the being, that tell us what A is. We reach the conclusion that these elements, in turn, are also, first of all, different from one another and, secondly, composed of other elements: namely, A’ is made up of A’’ and its inherent differences.

3. We direct our attention to A’’. In turn, A’’ is made up of A’’’ and the inherent differences... Etc. Etc. Etc.

If we wish, however, to find out which is the first point of absolute *initium* of the first instantiation in this infinite string of being, we only have at our disposal the following onto-logical ramifications:

α. Postulating an original Being that would no longer be able to be reduced to other component elements.⁹ The only difficulty is that such a being is conceived here through *dianoia*, namely, through *representation*. This is why such a being presents itself as a purely dogmatically postulated entity, without understanding what are the conditions or the attributes of its actuality. This raises two questions:

i. ***What makes it be***, as such?¹⁰

⁹ We are hereby reminded of **Definitions I and II** from Spinoza’s *Ethics* (Spinoza, 1957, p. 39). But there is a double difficulty in Spinoza’s case. Firstly, since Nothingness itself can claim a deeper “degree” of (me)ontological immediacy than Being, Spinoza does not provide sufficient explanations as to why he chooses Being instead of Nothingness. Secondly, since after postulating infinite Substance, Spinoza firstly admits the infinitely absolute plurality of attributes for the infinite absolute originary Substance, then the plurality of the Substance’s modes, one does not understand what is the source of this multiplicity of attributes and modes. Multiplicity cannot be given without difference, and the difference is essentially negation. This brings us back to the issue of Nothingness about which Spinoza mentions nothing in his writings. With the exception of the case in which the abstraction of the infinite absolute Substance itself would represent the foundation for an absolute reductive overlap between Substance and two of its fundamental modes: presence and absence, being and nothingness. Which is a step undertaken by Hegel who later proposes this approach by clearly stating that metaphysics must restart from the point where Spinoza left it. (Hegel, 1963, p. 443; Hegel, 2000a, p. 17).

¹⁰ This is the instance where any positivist intellect can afford the classical interrogative error as an “objection” against the argument of the “First Mover” or the “First Cause”: “And who or what created or caused God?” The question is mistaken because it presumes the discursive horizon of *representation* within which it also expects a solution to its interrogation.

ii. Hoes does one get from *a pure Being to determined beings*? Such a transition presupposes an absolute ontological difference. But a pure Being has no negations and, being, seemingly, absolute, it is not compatible with the concept of an exteriority that would provide us with the source of this negation either. If we chose to postulate, purely and simply, such a negative or nothingness as a counterpart, as an instance opposed to Being, out of a mere dialectical spirit, we would end up in the arbitrary and opaque situation of not finding any onto-logical legitimacy for the source of this negation, the postulate thus being unjustifiable.

β. Why should we uncritically postulate, at the end of the foundation of the strings of determinations a pure Being, since every positive element, every “quantum” of presence in every determination proved to be a negative entity, in fact, because, since it was marked by its own negations, every element was decomposable, deconstructable? Therefore, everything here will be exhaustively reduced to Nothingness.

1.2 Pure original Being

A. In order to respond to β. we need to first check the metaphysical coherence of point α. with its two implications: i. being is given as absolutely originary and pure, thus clear of any negative; ii. the passing from pure originary Being to determined being is either unexplainable, either founded in Emanationism, but in the latter case, there should no longer exist any determined, mortal being; and the very concept of “emanation” would be equally problematic, since the difference presupposed by the change of Being into emanation would be just as unintelligible. Or there wouldn’t even be any difference, thus emanation wouldn’t exist either.

We will start from the end and go to the beginning.

α. ii’. If the original Being is pure and without negation, then determine being is either unexplainable (even impossible), or it is an emanation from the originary Being, but then one cannot explain, however, its determination and, thus, the very principle of differentiation in emanation.¹¹

¹¹ This is the fundamental issue of Neoplatonism which, on the one hand, cannot explain the inner mechanism of Difference or of the Negative. On the other, precisely because of the first shortcoming, namely, that any derived instance is inscribed in a hierarchy, in a degenerating order. — At best, Plotinus argues that, if the inferior and derived elements form a relationship and pass from one state to another “sending forth as much of themselves as they can” to their environment and generating or producing effects, how could the Principle, the One remain closed in itself and not give itself over too, how could it not generate or beget or produce effects too? But this sending forth, this begetting, this overflowing and its results are, in Plotinus’s case, degenerating, as no occurrence of Difference is of the same being or rank as its Origin, though every occurrence is the Origin’s copy (*Enneads*, II (11), [1.]-[2.], IV (7), [1.], Plotinus, 2005, p. 509-511, 549-551).

Possible objections would argue that: **1.** determined being is an illusion; **2.** the determination of Being is an illusion.

In other words, the objection would claim that the ontological difference is an illusion. We have already discussed this sophistic contradiction: *if we have illusion, then we have ontological difference*. The illusion is impossible if there are no ontological differences or at least the possibility of ontological differences. Illusion itself consists in the variance between two elements (usually, subject and object or essence and appearance). For, if there is no difference between them, how could illusion be possible?

Consequently, regardless of whether we say that the determination of Being is an illusion, or that any “concurrent” or exterior existence to original Being is an illusion, illusion confirms and reveals the ontological Difference, namely the negative or, if we wish, Nothingness.

The next question arising here would be an attempt to clarify the relation between Being and Nothingness.

α. ii’. If we reached the conclusion that Nothingness is real (or that Nothingness, in J. Lacan’s words, “is inscribed in the Real”), then we must understand the two possible hypotheses we could formulate: **1.** Being and Nothingness are ontologically opposed to each other, so they represent an absolute dualism; **2.** Being and Nothingness are in a different kind of mutual position. And solving this hypothesis depends on the way in which we conceive the substance of Being itself (α . i.), respectively the void of Nothingness (β .).

1. Dualism implies exterior equivalence or the parity between Being and Nothingness.¹² If Being and Nothingness are (externally) equivalent, then they **a.** intermix with each other, they are interchangeable. And then they **b.** combine in an infinite complexity.

a. In the first case, where Being and Nothingness are equivalent and thus, interchangeable, the third-party horizon of their unity appears directly, respectively the horizon of the intermediary element that allows their intermixing. Since this third element contains both, it can be neither one nor the other. So it is a form of absolute indifference. However, since this indifference means absence of any multiplicity, Being and Nothingness immediately disappear. And the only “result” (result of our endeavour; ontologically, the third element is a foundation or a premise, not a result) is the ***Absolute Undetermined Immediacy***. (Hegel, 1966, p. 56)

¹² The mythical and theological scenarios that correspond to such a concept can be found in Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and Taoism. Even though Taoism, on the one hand, implies dualism rather on a cosmological level; on the other, the transcendent unity of *yin* and *yang* is absolutely undetermined, apophatic and evokes the undetermined identity of opposites (Lao Zi, 1999).

b. In the second case, we return to the presupposition of an infinite string of determinations we have already examined. But here we can rebuild the demonstration by supposing that there is a third term that enables the transition or translation from one multiplicity level to the other and maintains Being and Nothingness simultaneously as different and identical. This third element reveals itself as a consequence of the common discursive universe of both Being and Nothingness, on the one hand; on the other, it appears as a consequence of the difference between Being and Nothingness, a difference that would not belong to either of them (otherwise, they would be indistinct and no transition would be needed any more). Once this postulate is reached, then, on the one hand, the situation previously anticipated in **β**. is already underway. Specifically, we would deal with a multiple reciprocal shifting between quanta of being and quanta of differences; but each level of positive or actual quanta would prove to be reducible or deconstructable by virtue of its inner and outer determination. And to make the duality intelligible to the end, the only logical continuation is, on the other hand, the investigation regarding the pure Being itself, meaning section **α**. **i.**

2. Other types of positions can be those in which **a.** either Being, **b.** or Nothingness have a position regarded as ascendant or privileged in relation to the other.

a. But if Being has a privileged position, then we have a situation in which it is infinitely absolute, and Nothingness becomes only an infinitesimal “perimeter”, comprised and surrounded by Being on all “sides” (Octavian, 2003, p. 21-22). — Certain species of Gnosticism can be indicated as belonging to this perspective (Culianu, 1990/2002, p. 263-285; Grozea, 2001, p. 97-124; Manolache, 2000, p. 162-167). In fact, this situation is implied by the presupposition of marking off Being through the negative it rejects. As Being is infinitely actual absolute, then no difference between the whole and its parts is given in its substance. The consequence is that Being is already marked off entirely, compromised by the infinitesimal negative it rejects *ad infinitum*, but which constantly consumes it in this ontological rejection. However, since any source of Being is already marked off by the rejected negative, there is no origin or any purely homogenous point of Being unmarked by the negative that Being is supposed “to fight” sisyphically to overcome. Every “quantum” or particle of Being is itself a sum of negations, therefore no quantum of Being can actually escape the monstrous gravity of the negative chasm. Thus, Being is not consumed, but it has already been immediately consumed by the negative. And it presents itself as a chasm without substance as well, and it is directly and eternally reduced to its own abysmal void.

b. If Nothingness has a privileged position, the situation is not any less precarious. A Being that would be assumed as subsisting in an ocean of Nothingness

would immediately succumb into absolute ontological erosion.¹³ Its very substance would have to be actualised or established on a foundation other than its presence in the meontological ocean and thus one would have to seek yet again a solution of a third kind. Contrary, Being would immediately disappear, being immediately overwhelmed by the devouring Nothingness, the ontological deconstruction being immediately absolute. Rather, since the foundation here is the Absolute, Being would not have ever been actualised and everything is, again, reduced to Nothingness.

Therefore, we see that every supposition from **α.ii.** ends in Nothingness. This is the fate of *representation-thought*. It cannot conceive the entities it refers to without engaging them through forms that already comprise ontologically complex or disjunctive multiplicities, which cannot hold any position in relation to their origin other than the one of a derived, exterior element that is ultimately irrational. In other words, *representation* did not complete the phenomenological and ontological reduction through which it could aim for an unconfusing, truly irreducible, elementary foundation.

More precisely, the very concept of Being that this type of thought engages is one vitiated by an uncritically presumed transcendental appearance and which thus has dramatic consequences for any endeavour it inspires.

B. α.i. Here, the question undoubtedly is the one regarding Being, as we have formulated it above: *what* precisely *makes it be*, as such?

Normally, Being is *immediately supposed*: a presence, an act, something that is *in the here and now* or "*in general*". This means that it presents itself as continuity or as elementary continuum without interruptions. Any *distinctive point* of Being, analysed in itself, leads to this idea of irreducibility of the **abstract being** that essentially *maintains it*: disjoint from itself, *ad infinitum*, its abstract positing could never be terminally suppressed, since it is infinitely actually present in all its parts and any analysis of the *ens* of the "quantum" of being (however infinitesimal), could not, in fact, go past the first element, because it would be united, perichoretically and immediately integrated, yet extensively, with the infinite string of quanta of being set as its foundation.¹⁴ So the presence content, the being consistency of the

¹³ Ancient cosmogonist mythologies often draw upon the image of an indeterminate ocean from which an initial element singles itself out. — For the ancient Greeks, Chaos/Nyx was the original indetermination from which Uranus and Gaea spontaneously emerge. — Beyond the onto-logical (thus also intuitive) impossibility of such spontaneous punctual self-actualisations occurring out of Privation, one must note that such scenarios are the immediate ways in which thought immersed in *representation* has managed to irrationally settle the super-rational.

¹⁴ The Eleatic principle of the indivisibility of Being. An infinitesimally "small part" of Being is the whole of Being. "Summing up" the diversity that lies in such a pure identity-with-itself is instantaneous, absolutely immediate; namely, it does not occur, nor will it occur, nor has it ever occurred; **for it is given as such, already con-summated, without ever having been summed up per se.** — This principle was later resumed and theologically confirmed in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

quantum would be in itself unlimited, unbound, therefore irreducible. Or, conversely, the analysis of the first quantum would immediately contain the analysis of the entire infinite string, because no difference between one quantum and another, between one part and the whole, are given in being, such that any part contains, in fact, the whole with the entirety of its multiplicity. In other words, the infinite disjunction of abstract being in the multiplicity of its constituting elements would never end; similarly, disjunction would be unable not only to go past the first quantum, but not even to instantiate its first *initium* point, both because of the impenetrability of an *absolute infinite* string and **of the pure impossibility of locating or effectively, yieldingly, concretely apprehend such oneness**. This idea is usually directly expressed through the logical formula of identity: $A \equiv A$ or $A=A$. At any rate, it is the identity Being is equated with.

Concerning this idea, some interpretations have tried to eliminate the concept of multiplicity implicitly contained in the idea of identity or continuum, arguing that multiplicity pertains only to our *representation*. In its essence, Being and, implicitly, identity, are absolute immediacy. But once we speak of absolute immediacy, it is impossible to keep speaking of Being and identity. For these represent precisely a presence, an actuality; in other words, they irreducibly suppose **something manifest, even though enstatic**, and what is manifest is, at the same time, **differentiated, therefore in an ontological extension with itself, regardless of how immediate or co-interior this identity or extension is**. This means continuum or equality, or any other name of such meaning that we would want to use. Yet this extension is irreducibly a *multiplicity*, even though the ontological caesura between the multiples is here suspended or eliminated or transformed in any way.

This leads us to the fundamental issue in this matter: what is the immediate, fundamental point, the initial quantum (in whatever sense or direction would it be considered) that represents the essence of this Being or identity? But, more importantly, what is given “before” this quantum, “before” the “first extension”?¹⁵

¹⁵ A question that does not coincide with the atheist question: “Who or what has created or caused God?”. For the simple reason that here we have overcome the positivist thought that phantasmatically identifies determinations everywhere. And which, consequently, implies as answer to its question (addressed, with an unconscious self assured vanity, to the void itself) nothing but an infinite string of interconditioned determinations. Namely, it supposes the very ontological relativism of the infinite string of determinations that has been previously analysed and which we have just proven as impossible above in section 1.1. And when, in order to overcome the impossibility of this string (perceivable even intuitively), the atheist intellect believes that it experiences, in turn, a form of immediacy or exhaustion, in fact it does not presume to place it anywhere else but within **determined being** grossly apprehendable through empirical “immediacy”. This is why it sacrifices even its very own phenomenological reduction through which it could devise a form of mystery or transcendence however imprecise. What this drive brings forth is nothing but the absolute futility of questions such as the one above.

Such a hyper-analysis leads to this conclusion: the extension, the consistency or the substance of pure Being consists, essentially, in **the absolute and immediate conversion of the negative into affirmative; this is given as an absolutely immediate coincidence of the negative with itself in its absolute lack of coincidence with itself or with anything else.** We will briefly resume the arguments for this conclusion:

1. Being is something *manifest*, therefore *extensive*.
2. Extension means multiplicity, and the manifest means differentiation (Hegel, 2000a, p. 9-49).

3. Differentiation and multiplicity already suppose the negative, i.e., the ontological rejection by which at least two elements are maintained as ultimately disjoint, never overlapping.

4. This negative would precisely have the implication of a complex substance such as an infinite string of elements and levels — a paradigm we have proven false in section 1.1 of this text. The essential feature of such a structure of ontological or pyramidal ordering is the infinite delaying of its own overall actuality and of any of its levels in particular by its foundation's adjournment from one level to the other.

5. But pure Being does not manifest such symptoms: the elements contain one another, but not hierarchically, pyramidally, orderly etc., but *perichoretically*, they overlap in a pure and absolute extensive and self-transparent singularity; the transition from one element to another in this multiplicity does not raise the difficulty of overcoming the boundary, the interstitial ontological exteriority, since the transition has already been made and given without having actually ever to be accomplished, since the elements are identical in the infinity of their foundation. However, since Being does undoubtedly possess an extension, it is something manifest and present, thus it contains multiplicity — **the elements of this multiplicity are utterly different from one another.** However, although their difference is real and irreducible, it is simultaneously and analytically constituted as a simultaneous and absolutely infinite overlapping of all their parts and of all their inner elements. (John of Damascus, 2004, p. 19; Maximus the Confessor, 1990, p. 69-78, 1999, p. 211-212, II, 1.; Palamas G. S., 1977, p. 287-298, 310-311; Palamas G. S., 2009, p. 343). —

— We anticipate here the fact that, at the end of our endeavour, after having reached the criterion of effectiveness and immediacy, we will indeed find in **our empirical immediate world** the **presentification** of Being as directly accessible, but, however, not directly comprehensible and apprehendable. The world's determined things, those we can perceive with our sensitive intuition, are indeed a true form in which we partake of Substance. They are a genuine sign of Immediacy. But this sign is not self-sufficient and, consequently, it is not immediately apprehendable and intuitively perceivable in the entire absolute infinite string of its ontological instauration. Such apprehension could only be the object of an intellectual intuition or of a metaphysical speculation. Thus, positivism turns out to be nothing but the erroneous result of a flaw in transcendental topology and intentionality. —

For the same reading, see St. Anselm of Canterbury (Anselm, 1997, p. 25). — Thus, the difference does not reveal discontinuities or these discontinuities are “closed up” and “filled up” by and in themselves with Being or as Being and they articulate an absolute continuum of those respective elements.

6. Moreover, if we pursue to the end the absolute coincidence of pure Being’s elements, if the absolutely and perichoretic identical multiplicity of the substance of pure Being is seen in its essential nature, in its condition of absolute actuality, the absolute concept of the identity of elements, placed in the (over)borderline horizon of its own superlative, immediately leads to *pure immediacy* in which the condition of overlapping for overlapped elements is already completed (without ever having to be completed). For they are not given as identical, but they have already been given as such in absolute (Hegel, 1966, p. 64-65). Their identity is not extensively summed up, but it is already given in the pure anteriority of the absolute immediacy.

7. *The only conclusion compatible with these findings is the immediate overlapping tautology, the absolute and original coincidence between Identity and Difference.* Thus, responding to the second question, “what is given before the first quantum of presence of perichoretic actuality?” — it is this **absolute coincidence between Identity and Difference.**

Nevertheless, the concept of this ultimate overlap is unreachable unless one is willing to analyse Difference itself in its very own concept, hence to continue with our (me)ontological reduction already disclosed in the Preamble’s preceding sections. All the more so as considering that even inside pure Being, as analysed here, the Foundation proves to be an essence fundamentally originated only from Difference (thus, Negation, thus Absence, thus Nothingness) absolutely “converted” (i.e., revealed) in itself as affirmation, presence, being, identity, continuum. — Namely, the revelation here is that Being already presents itself to us as Nothingness immediately reverted or absolutely reflected in itself, absolutely and immediately prior to any other reversion or reflection; and this occurs precisely because **this Nothingness is not privative, nor has it ever been.** Some kind of absolutely self-differentiated Difference in the immediacy of its own prior identity or an absolute Difference of Difference in relation to the identically absolute immediacy differentiated prior to differentiation itself. Therefore, some kind of a pure and absolute, apophatic and exhaustive Transcendence of the (non)*something* which appeared in the original texts of metaphysical or theological thought as the superlative of absolute Indeterminateness.¹⁶ The absolute

¹⁶ Here, the final intuition of the transcendence of radical indeterminateness seems to be ecumenical. Although its every cultural postulation had very different, sometimes opposite, doctrinal, speculative and ideological consequences in the works of the authors we passingly mention here: Lao Tse; Plato (*Parmenides, The Sophist*); Plotinus; Adi Śankarāchārya (*Advaita Vedanta*); St. Dionysus the Areopagite;

and transcendent void deprived not only of determinations, but of the presence of any *something*, anything manifest, thus of anything in the absolute, leads to an absolute withdrawal in the pure immediacy which, being completed in itself absolutely self-differentiatedly beyond any multiple, is the absolute and transcendent plenitude of over-determinateness,¹⁷ that is the immediately absolute ontological condition for the *something* or for that which is given as manifest. As already cleared above, we can call this the **(Absolute) Undetermined Immediacy**. This concept will be briefly developed below.

1.3 The originary actual Nothingness or the over-Being. The **Absolute Undetermined Immediacy**

β. We will start here by the speculative experiment of the β. version: the ontological and phenomenological reduction is taken to the complete exhaustion of any quantum of Being, a Being that is “dissolved” or revealed in its originally immediate substance as Nothingness. We will briefly examine the presupposition of this Nothingness.¹⁸

Here, we will firstly discuss the supposition of the over-determination of the absolute Impossible¹⁹ that bears the absolutely immediate and irreducible premise both for the void of Nothingness and the continuum of Being. — The concept that presents itself as such a premise is that of the **Absolute Undetermined Immediacy**.

The **Absolute Undetermined Immediacy** appeared as the point of absolute *initium* of the pure extensive Being, as we have shown above. The same point also appears at the outset of Nothingness’s concept analysis: Nothingness itself, as Absence or Negation, usually appears as an intensive void through which one can glimpse an emptiness, but a “consistent” emptiness — *representation* attempts to intuit here

St. Gregory of Nyssa; St. Basil the Great; St. Cyril of Alexandria; St. John Chrysostom; St. Maximus the Confessor; St. Symeon the New Theologian; Meister Eckhart; Nicholas of Cusa; J.G. Fichte; F.W.J. Schelling; G.W.F. Hegel. The cultural adversity of the above doctrinal implications can be ascribed to subjective historical failures. However, the primal originary intuition of radical Indeterminateness can be understood as munificence of a transcendent donation.

¹⁷ Or of the **To Be**. (Octavian, 2003, p. 20-21, 26-30)

¹⁸ To be as clear as possible and remove any source of confusion, it must be said that there aren’t two types of absolute immediate and (over)apophatic Nothingness. But here we speak about the **Undetermined Immediacy** as root or as pure un-beginning, which, in dogmatic Trinitarian theology, was expressed through the common Nature of the Hypostases.

¹⁹ Let us not forget J. Lacan’s words: „L’impossible c’est le Réel” (Lacan, 1967).

a certain form of the purely void and absolutely abstract “a-dimensionality” or “intension” or “punctuality”. It is the reverse of Being, an analytic-reductive mode of referring to the multiple of Being. Although intuitively closer to the concept of **Immediacy**, Nothingness is itself here given as a mediation of a collapse or a fundamental destruction that leaves behind the inexistent surface of an implosion of the deep when it is thus conceived, as “a-dimensionality” or absolutely void and abstract “intension”.²⁰

But if the two concepts both appear as mediated, one through the immediate extension of the multiple, the other through the immediate collapse of the infinitesimally self-devouring fragmentation, then their common origin can only be the **Absolute Undetermined Immediacy**.

We have observed earlier that the reason why pure Being is a pure and absolute continuum is due to the absolutely immediate reflection of Nothingness. If this is the case — and our endeavour has apodictically brought us to this point —, the main issue of the whole discussion is precisely that of the absolute transmutation of Nothingness, the nature of its absolute reflection. Yet, since this very Nothingness has been reduced itself too as an absolutely mediated non-element in its immediacy of opposition against Being, what must be discussed is not the absolute reflection of Nothingness, be it absolute, as obtained through ontological fragmentation, but the self-division of the pure unbeginning of the **Undetermined Immediacy** as the pure point of *initium* for any original mediation, be it meontological.

²⁰ Paraphrasing Hegel, it can be said that the Nothingness just obtained here is the Nothingness of the elements whose annulment originated it. Yet, precisely because it was obtained by the annulment of pure and absolute Being, rather than of the world, the Nothingness obtained by suppressing Being preserves the converse effect of the meontological lack of extension. Thus, a form of mediation. In order to reach immediacy itself, any form of *representation* must be eliminated and only thus the suppression of the concept of Nothingness itself is reached. That which emerges then is nothing but pure and absolutely prior averting of reference and non-reference: the **Absolute Undetermined Immediacy**.

Also, speaking about the last hypotheses of modern (even postmodern) cosmology, we see in the attempts made by string theory, for instance, the claim to start from zero premises and to postulate a so-called “nothingness” as foundation of the original phenomenal world. However, as soon as one investigates what is understood in cosmology through this “nothingness”, one discovers that it is in fact a determined instantiation, with a hyperphysical phenomenology which manifests certain states subject to mathematical description. Generally speaking, the “nothingness” of physicists does not go beyond the concept of spatial or hyper-spatial void; and some of them have vacuous difficulties in understanding the differences between phenomena such as trans-specific causality or biological or quantic potentiality, on the one hand, and “absolute” genesis from nothingness, on the other. (Krauss, 2012, p. 73-74, 148-149). Such that this “nothingness” is not genuine “Nothingness” at all, but is rather a more peculiar hyper-space.

How can Nothingness reveal itself as an element of positiveness and set the original ontological continuum, instead of being the exponent of pure and absolute meontological dissolution, therefore of pure impossibility? In the absence of an intellectual (mystical) intuition, the answer to this question can only be ascertained somewhat schematically in the speculative analytics of the **Undetermined Immediacy**.²¹

During this endeavour, the thought regarding the steps of the brief speculative dialectic discussed above was essentially limited to *representation*. Thereby, every time a concept was articulated, the object designated by the concept represented a form of extension or substantiation: *representation* is by definition marked by the need of something concretely manifested, regardless of whether the object is or not radically abstract, in relation to empirical sensitivity — as is the case with the concept of pure Being or pure Nothingness.

But once we encountered the concept of **Undetermined Immediacy**, we may witness the complete suppression of any form of instantiation of anything manifest, of substance itself.²² Substance, or that which is manifest, is defined through the mediation of its enstasis or presentification. In other words, they are units, therefore (perichoretical, ultimately) syntheses of multiples. Thus, they are results, or if we wish, products of a primary activity belonging to a foundation horizon that, in its radical nature, cannot be merely an already established transmission of the manifest. But **pure and absolute Undetermined Immediacy** means the finality of suppressing any kind of content, extension, intension, dimensionality, a-dimensionality, singularity, unity, multiplicity, fragmentation, void, non-intentionality or substance.

²¹ Patristics never ceases to warn us against any endeavour of conceiving the Absolute Essence by untransfigured human thought. On the other hand, the same Patristics also uses arguments and human language and concepts through which, in response to heresies, formulates the articulation of the mystery. We believe that those precautions primarily address human *hubris*, which we hope to have left behind. Not least, the warning also refers to the adequacy of thought to an absolute Transcendence only evoked in the interjections of superlatives that merely deepen this distance. But we do not claim here to formulate a more detailed or more daring endeavour than the one already discovered by Patristic authors.

²² One may also find in Hegel such radical over-terminality, but as it ensues from the pages of the *Science of Logic*, it occurs somehow against the grain in relation to author's accents, after initially having been correctly addressed already starting with the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in whose **Preface** this concept is recurrently articulated. When Hegel discusses the pure unity between Being and Nothingness, he indicates that they are simultaneously absolutely different. However, their difference is actually *ineffable* (Hegel, 1966, p. 74). Thus, what is given, in fact, is their absolute identity and the fact that one passes into the other, while their difference remains unapprehensible; if one is to believe certain critical interpretations regarding Hegelianism, it would even remain without consequences. As we will demonstrate in a future study, it is precisely this unapprehensible definition that represents the ultimate drive of the speculative discourse in general and of Hegel's discourse in particular (Hegel, 1966, p. 64-75).

We therefore speak about the complete, radical, ontological disappearance of the *something* and of the *non-something* or about the absolute freedom from the horizon of any kind or of any stasis.²³

The absolute withdrawal from what is manifest into what is non-manifest, or rather into something over-manifest²⁴ leads to the suppression of all reference, therefore to the impossibility of common phatic access to this realm of ontological contiguity which is so concealed that not even the mystery of apophatism appears as satisfactory.²⁵ Rather, any mode of expression regarding the *Undetermined*

²³ In modernity, Karl Barth (Barth, 1964) is the one who raised the issue of the complete renunciation of any postulate concerning a positive knowledge of God. Sophistically overemphasizing God's absolute freedom from any instantiation and intelligibility, under the pretext of the super-intelligibility that is so often posited in the texts of the Christian tradition, Barth is willing to accept that all dogmatic formulations are nothing but pure voluntary relations of God to man. In Himself, the Transcendent could not be postulated through any kind of predication, however superlative, and regardless of the level of transcendence entailed by the predication. Thus, God definitively disappears and what appears in His place is a horizon of pure and absolutely unrelated arbitrariness that, just by "chance", through some kind of preferential "accident", initiated its determined and purely random communicability (the doctrine of the Holy Trinity becomes a kind of optional revelation, thus a version out of an absolute infinity) towards an equally accidental creature. Thesis that reinstates the ancient absolute distance between an absolute *deus otiosus* and a creature lost in its own foundational darkness, a result of the Darkness of a non-Foundation.

We believe that it is much too easily forgotten in this doctrine that any postulate of such a radical Transcendence already creates the premises of a super-hypostatization, because this very radical Difference will be marked in itself at the same moment and by the same movement by which it will absolutely differ from this marking. Which already calls upon Identity, no matter how over-determined. But we will investigate this paralogism that retains only one side of the absolute movement in another study. (Barth, 1964, p. 236-242; Scrima, 2005, p. 61-99).

²⁴ It has been argued in favour of using antinomic terms in discussions regarding apophatic transcendence (an idea to which we subscribe). At the same time, the terms using the idea of superlative (by possibly adding the prefix *hyper*) are demoted to establishing objective determinations, since they analytically entail the idea of correlation with something inferior (Scrima, 2005, p. 66-69, 77-81). In the above circumstance, choosing a formula that uses the superlative prefix does not indicate superiority in relation to an inferior category, but it means a fundamental coincidence between principle and occurrence, or better, said, between the principle and itself. It should hereby be emphasized that the focus is on the *transcendent* identity of the principle with itself, all the more so since the essence of the language used in this text regarding the concept of *Undetermined Immediacy* is built on the notion of speculative antinomy, as can be seen. Also in this antinomy that conveys the concept of immediacy, any of the versions expressing the absolutely immediate and indeterminate "apophatism" is equal to any other. — See also A. Bereschi: *Afterword* (Cusanus, 2008b, p. 575-576).

²⁵ Apophatism underlines God's indeterminateness by cancelling the predicates; but the divine over-Being still remains here as well as a self-established *something*. Yet, the *Absolute Undetermined Immediacy* is the pure anteriority of the non- or the over-non-establishment. Theologically, it only corresponds to the Hypostatical Origin or, in dogmatic terms, to the unknowable "abysses" "in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18, KJV).

Immediacy will be a type of approximation in which the terminality of both representation and concept will occur, because within the **Undetermined Immediacy** occurs the absolute suppression or are played the stakes of its own “conditions” of (im)possibility. In a proper sense, the **Undetermined Immediacy** cannot be enlightened not even through the concept of absence or void, because the absence and the void are terms with an implicitly correlative meaning.²⁶ They lead to the meaning of suppressing **something**, which immediately entails *determination*, since it is spoken of the absence of *something* from a background or from a matrix or a membrane that is supposed to contain it or to which it is supposed to return; it does not lead to the idea of absolute suppression of anything, therefore of the matrix itself too, or of any kind of membrane or background. The **Undetermined Immediacy** is the absolute and pure suppression, without remnant, thus without any possibility of resuming the vanished elementariness within the parameters that comprised it or within similar ones. Within **Undetermined Immediacy**, one finds the definitive consumption of any substantiation and the compression of the absolute evanescence of any abstract intension, regardless of how narrowly confined “imprisoning”, void and a-dimensional it might be. Within **Undetermined Immediacy** both Being and Nothingness simply disappear in the non-margins of a non-abysse tighter than the sealed, never opened fissure of its own suppression.

There is no “moment” where **Undetermined Immediacy** would fail to be absolute immediacy. Thus, absolute suppression is not given in the **Undetermined Immediacy**, but it was never given, such that it has already been given in the non-suppression of the immediate absence of nothing. This suppression of unsuppressed suppression is the preceding point of the pure non-foundation as non-absence of the already suppressed absence and absolutely devoid of any passage. This pure immediacy, this unaltered stasis absolutely withdrawn in the perfect lack of content of a boundless realm which does not exist because it circumscribes no presence, no content, is its very conclusion before any beginning; a conclusion from which an eternal beginning springs through the deepening of the ineffable sealing of the unBeginning.²⁷

²⁶ J. Derrida appears to have taken the same path in his text *Différance* — the same pure and non-correlative suppression, the same absolute search for a unity without object; the same rejection even of apophatism, because it wouldn't be “radical enough”. However, Derrida's endeavour turns against his own intent when, from the “empty” sealed “tomb” of speech, *la différance* suddenly appears as... “temporization and spacing” — videlicet, from the trans-ontological towering of absolute rarefaction, he ends up making an unsuccessful crash landing in the realm of determined being where onticity is immediately founded within the formal conditions of the transcendental subject's intuition (time and space) (Derrida, 1972, p. 6-9).

²⁷ The Western texts or authors who examine in more general or more specific terms the issue of the **Undetermined Immediacy** can be briefly enumerated: Plato in his dialogues *Parmenides* and *The Sophist*; Plotinus in *Enneade*; Damascius in *Difficulties and Solutions of First Principles*; Dionysus the

— After all, it is both vapid and necessary to go over these language exhaustions through which we attempt to (dis)articulate the “normal perception” of substantiated and substantiating thought. But the radical overcoming or the death of *representation* compels us to breathe the substantiated ether’s voidness collapse of the predicative meaning speech form. —

This immediate unbegin collapse is immediately identical to itself, for no mediation disturbs its stasis. But it is the absolute self-division and self-mediation in itself, because it is immediately given as something immediate absolutely before its own immediacy (Hegel, 2000a, p. 39). — The concept of “immediacy” is crucial here, because it simultaneously presumes both the pure immediateness of pure coincidence, and the absolute immediateness of the collapse of immediacy itself as coincident instantiation, prior to actual collapse. Since it is precisely the impossibility to obtain content, something manifest or substantiated that indicates the immutable suppression of self-instantiation, thus its immediate exhaustion as prior to itself.

The hereby simple result is that ***Undetermined Immediacy*** is simultaneous absolute identity of the absolute non-particulateness of the absolutely immediate arrest in the pure vibrationless and extensionless result; and absolute self-differentiation in absolute extensionless self-precedence. This is the absolute non-point, the immutable and ineffable non-fissure through which and in which identity is irreducibly given in the factual impossibility of effective non-reduction — because here reduction is already accomplished exhaustion. Hereby factual identity is self-differentiated through and within the very absolute antecedence of the immediate exhaustion of “self”-precedence. And hereby factual identity is its own absolute remnantless self-division.

The entire concept of ***Undetermined Immediacy*** analytically engages the ultimate and over-terminal overlap between affirmative and negative, identity and difference, etc. Therefore, in this over-terminal and over-reductive overlap, the negative, both through its factual exhaustion and its factual identity ground and last but not least, through its immediate unfolded oneness with its absolute *initium* — (no longer) has any privative, rejective property or of bare ontological exteriorisation. It preserves its standing as ground of all distinctions. But distinctions do not hereby operate privatively, but effectively, namely as fulcra of actualising.²⁸ As in the old

Areopagite; The Holy Cappadocian Fathers; St. Maximus the Confessor; St. Symeon the New Theologian; Meister Eckhart; John Scotus Eriugena; Nicholas of Cusa; Jakob Boehme; G.W.F. Hegel; F.W.J. Schelling. Other discussions and attempts can be found in Martin Heidegger (Heidegger, 1957/1990) or Nikolai Berdiaev (Berdiaev, 1946/1999).

²⁸ Here, we would like to explain that the antinomy grounded by the concept of the ***Undetermined Immediacy*** for the determined intellect is no longer specific for any of the three types of antinomies identified by L. Blaga in the *Dogmatic Eon* (Blaga, 2013): dogmatic antinomies, dialectic antinomies

mythologies or traditions in which a character's experience of death implies a palingenetic value, the **Undetermined Immediacy** grounds the non-privative Negative of the Absolute; the distinctions are all mere *representational* anticipations of the absolute palingenesis established on Golgotha, which is the essential original achievement of the revelation of the non-privative Negative in onticity. — At the point where *representation-thought* established the sterile negative of privation or circumscription, thus the limited Negative, speculative thought formulates the concept of the unlimited or non-privative Negative through which, once exhausted, the opposite elements postulated as irretrievably excluding each other converge in a real oneness. This concept of the non-privative Negative or Nothingness comes from Christian theology that, without exhaustively expounding it, implies it as mystery of dogmatic formulations.²⁹ And this too is, evidently, in a direct correspondence with the concept of suppressing the negative through the speculative *Aufhebung* in Hegel — as exhibited in the **Preface** and chapter **Force and Intellect** in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as well as in *The Science of Logic* (Hegel, 1966, p. 88-90; Hegel, 2000a, p. 9-49, 82-104). — The speculative is precisely the exhaustive turning point of the difference or of the negative, even at the level of an element contained in the phenomenological analysis through which exteriority or heterogeneity, the contingency of the elementary multiple is reflexively reversed and, thus exhaustively, onto itself; and this reflexive turn simultaneously and apodictically mirrors the absolute overlap between the identity and the difference of states or properties of opposite elements, which unveils the absolute speculative oneness (hereby simultaneously given with the reality of difference) of elements originally believed to be disjunctive, irreconcilable, and for whose unity or interaction one would either formerly call upon a perpetually disjunctive multiplicity of elements in a relationship of ontological “ordering”, either proclaim the most brutal reductionism to one of the

and a-categorical antinomies. Or, more precisely, the transcendence of the absolute seal of the **Undetermined Immediacy** reveals itself as absolute coincidence of all three types of antinomies. It is a dogmatic antinomy, because it is founded on the transfiguration of the Nothingness concept; it is an antinomy of speculative dialectic, because it is attained through the coincidence of opposite terms in a term that reprises them analytically and synthetically in a system of reflected exhaustion — we hereby use *speculative dialectic* in its Hegelian description founded by *Aufhebung*, not in the sense used by Błaga —; and it is an a-categorical antinomy, because it constitutes itself as a transcendence of opposite terms which are given as moments of this transcendence, as this a-categoriality is described by Nicholas of Cusa. — See also A. Bereschi's study quoted above (Cusanus, 2008b, p. 579-581).

²⁹ See the patristic works mentioned above. Each one of the Holy Fathers spoke about the birth of the Son from the Father, showing that it is ineffably and radically transcendent from any worldly or thought phenomenon. Therefore, essentially, it is fundamentally **non-privative** (The Areopagite, 1996; Cyril of Alexandria, 1994, p. 19-23; Basil the Great, 2001, p. 93-123).

spheres or states. Once this level was reached, as Hegel tells us, *representation* itself as a mode of thinking is completely removed from the speculative punctures of the contemplative articulations through its transformation, through its conceptual *metanoia*; and it's not natural, empirical, split thought that applies anymore instead of it or as its ground, but that which replaces it is the speculative experiential thought of the concept founded on exhaustion and unification with and through difference (Hegel, 1966, p. 597-621, 756-762; Hegel, 2000a). *Representation* should not be completely excluded as a tool; inasmuch as its foundation and dynamic coordinates have changed through the speculative endeavour, it is still legitimate and can be used inasmuch as the risks of its confusions are all disabled.

In the instances where *representation* has not yet been speculatively or contemplatively overcome, by definition the philosophic endeavour will be marked by the conceptual insolvency of *representations*. Thereby, discursive terms will always be caught in the mutual reduction or expansion of a dialectic devoid of destiny and, thus, without sense and rest. The aberrations of *representation-thought* will restlessly and worthlessly be carried through all kinds of ontological scenarios unable to overcome the stage of a hypothesis, thus of a phantasm. This is why a genuine metaphysical endeavour is immediately called upon here every time to identify the uncritically supposed hypothesis, namely to deconstructively uncover the assumptions underlying the flawed foundation of the theoretical edifice. However, in the absence of an irreducible landmark, as well as of the coordinates through which it is actualised in determination, all philosophy will be reduced to the continuous passing of the noetic spectre from one determination to another through the continuous criticism of the hypotheses that, pretentiously and academically, always claims to be culminating in a "(new) paradigm change" or, even worse, in the irrepressible hypothesis of a kind of "permanent revolution". The sterility of such damnation can only be equalled by the empty importance that thought bestows upon itself in its repeated unredemptive and correctional self-mortification.

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SORTIR DU POSITIVISME EN ALLANT VERS L'ETHIQUE DE LA DISTINCTION

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RÉSUMÉ. Ce texte propose de revisiter l'éthique sous l'angle d'un concept peu approfondi qui est la distinction. Qu'est ce que nous entendons la distinction ?

A l'heure où l'éthique semble drainer un ensemble de valeurs confuses et où sa demande paraît déceler un désaccord profond sur les éthos, il convient sans doute de revenir à l'approfondissement de ce concept de distinction. Celui-ci demeure une des clefs de la recherche personnelle que nous avons modestement entreprise depuis une trentaine d'année, d'abord comme juriste puis comme philosophe.

La distinction est, selon l'approche que nous proposons, un médian entre la séparation et la confusion. Elle est ce qui permet de saisir des nuances de chaque entité quelle qu'elle soit. La saisine de ces nuances est essentielle pour trouver les médiations elles-même vitales pour l'équilibre de tout être, pris à la fois au sens individuel ou-et collectif du terme. Elle est donc un des outils d'une éthique digne de ce nom mais aussi d'une philosophie qui recherche à mettre en évidence - sans idéalisme ni cynisme - une harmonie des profondeurs.

Les médiations, toutes en nuance, assurent les ponts entre deux extrêmes qu'il ne s'agit pas de vouloir éradiquer mais qu'il faut plutôt chercher à distinguer afin d'éviter qu'ils nous écrasent tant ils parlent et hurlent fort. La distinction est donc le seul moyen de ne pas se laisse emporter par ce flot de bavardages insipides.

Mots-clés : *droit- éthique - distinction- médiation*

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Notre dernier travail avait pour ambition de sortir de la crise du positivisme en proposant un post-positivisme qui se voudrait être une manière de tenir compte des progrès accomplis par le droit et la science politique occidentales en essayant d'ouvrir d'autres chemins. De tels chemins ne doivent pas exclure ou opposer mais compléter.

Naturellement cette étude du droit nous a conduit vers l'éthique mais quelle éthique ? Celle que nous proposons penser souhaite oeuvrer dans le sens de la distinction.

Toutefois, nous avons bien ici conscience d'être dans une nouvelle étape. Ce travail ne peut se considérer comme un aboutissement. Il n'est qu'une recherche. La recherche est décriée pourtant comment parvenir à l'aboutissement et l'accomplissement sans elle ? Il faut plusieurs essais pour être dans la réalisation. La recherche, selon nous, est même centrale si son objectif est de trouver pour réparer car, comme nous le verrons, il nous semble qu'au dessus de la pensée se trouve l'action et qu'au dessus de l'action est la réparation. Mais nous y reviendrons.

Ces approches ne peuvent être fructueuses que si elles se prennent pour ce qu'elles doivent être : des étapes vers le vrai qui se dévoile et se dissimule et se dévoile et se dissimule et ce à l'infini peut-être et non le vrai. Pour cette raison, bien modestement, nous avons proposé de classer cette approche dans la catégorie des « essais » que nous espérons pouvoir transformer un jour en acte puis en réparation effective.

En attendant, nous allons donc ici essayer de cerner l'éthique car un tel travail nous paraît essentiel voire nécessaire.

Il est nécessaire pour préparer l'action qui elle-même se doit de permettre la réparation – nous l'avons indiqué – mais aussi pour repenser cette réparation elle-même et réparer un monde positiviste en plein désarroi et clarifier certaines idées trop confuses et qui obscurcissent et enténébrent notre monde.

Le positivisme est la pensée dominante du monde politique et juridique occidental de notre époque. Or il faut le dépasser car il ne parvient plus à légitimer notre modèle social et politique.

Il est important d'oeuvrer en ce domaine car si les régimes qui défendent la liberté et la pluralité de pensées, d'expression, de croyances, ne trouvent plus de moyens de se légitimer, ils risquent fort de céder le pouvoir aux populismes et tyrannies de tous ordres. Pour le dire autrement, si les régimes qui croient au pluralisme des idées ne se légitiment plus, ils risquent de céder la place aux régimes populistes et autoritaires.

Dans le même temps, si la philosophie ne se rapproche pas plus de la réalité et si elle reste enfermée dans cette quête de vérité abstraite, elle restera éloignée du monde et des autres et ainsi elle cessera de jouer, pour nous, son rôle qui est de mettre en œuvre une éthique digne de ce nom qui se doit de distinguer ce qui se doit de l'être et en premier lieu ce qui doit être pensé, ce qui doit conduire à l'action et ce qui doit être guéri.

Notre projet est donc de revenir aux fondements du droit, à ce qui pourrait le légitimer dans une société plurielle et multi-confessionnelle.

Pour cela, il convient de repartir d'Aristote. Or depuis ce penseur, il est indéniable qu'en Occident, c'est par l'éthique que toute démarche individuelle et collective se légitime. Mais qu'est ce l'éthique ? Le concept est de plus en plus usité mais il recouvre une réalité devenue de plus en plus obscure pour nombre d'entre nous.

En un mot, l'éthique vise pour nous le mieux-être et celui-ci permet de trouver le juste espace pour soi et pour l'autre.

Développer la recherche en ce domaine nous paraît essentiel. En effet, en ces temps où l'individu est devenu roi, le risque est grand qu'il ne devienne tyran en tous les espaces où il peut avoir quelque pouvoir. Pour lui éviter de tomber dans cette déviance, il nous faut donc appréhender ce qui pourrait l'aider à s'améliorer et devenir meilleur. Telle est la fonction de l'éthique.

Or celle-ci est nécessaire de nos jours car le droit est perçu par nos concitoyens comme une discipline rigide composée de normes de plus en plus obscures qui paraissent corseter l'agir et le penser. Or ce droit était ce qui créait des bornes à la violence inhérente à nos sociétés. Sa disparition et sa délégitimation risquent alors de déchaîner celle-ci. Cependant, nous ne pouvons plus avoir la naïveté d'autrefois et croire qu'il doit avoir la forme que Kelsen ou Schmitt lui avaient attribué.

Le droit est plus complexe et plus subtil. Il trouve ses racines dans l'éthique qui elle-même a des racines plus profondes. Cependant, nous avons ignoré ces vérités. Nous sommes restés à la surface voire pire pour ne pas voir le vrai nous avons souvent opté pour le travestissement et de travestissements en travestissements le mensonge s'est parfois installé.

Comment en sommes-nous arrivés là ? Par une série de glissements progressifs qui nous ont fait oublier la véritable nature d'un droit dont la nature profonde est, selon nous et les recherches que nous avons entreprises, ce qui permet à chacun d'avoir son espace pour soi.

Pour trouver cet espace, il faut continuellement lever les voiles du mensonge et de l'erreur. Pour cela il faut de la force et suivre ce chemin qu'il nous montre. Le droit n'est donc qu'un chemin rempli d'étoiles au milieu de la nuit de nos vies. Or en rejetant les étoiles, nous nous sommes laissés aveuglés par les fausses lumières et croyant bien voir nous avons fait de lui une discipline.

Comment tout ceci a-t-il commencé ? Difficile de trouver une origine à ce qui est avant tout le produit d'un cercle. Cependant, des repères peuvent être mis en évidence et l'un d'eux est ce moment où – en occident – avec les Lumières, l'Europe a inventé le culte d'une loi dont elle avait perdu le sens profond et qui ne fut plus qu'une enveloppe de contrainte.

Contrairement à ce que d'aucuns pensent, les Lumières elles-mêmes furent dans l'erreur et il nous faut à présent le reconnaître. En effet, elles furent obsédés par la loi alors que celle-ci n'est qu'un phénomène. De plus, elles n'ont pas bien compris que celle-ci n'est qu'une étoile qui doit guider le chemin et non le chemin lui-même. Pour elles, la loi était ainsi un grand principe d'ordre général et une manière de cadrer les hommes tout en limitant la tyrannie. Elle était une borne rigide et écrite qui devait représenter la volonté générale au mieux et au pire celle de la volonté d'un peuple.

Mais qu'était ce que cette volonté générale ? Elle ne fut jamais explorée et devint toujours une sorte d'étendard que les foules suivaient sans même qu'il lui fut jamais expliqué ni compris. Pouvait-il l'être d'ailleurs, car le droit n'est pas que général. En ce qu'il est chemin, il est d'abord individuel.

De plus, la loi ne pouvait être qu'un signe vers quelque chose de plus haut qu'elle et vers lequel il nous fallait aller or elle devint la source première du droit et celui-ci ainsi cessa de devenir un chemin.

A cet amour de la loi – que d'aucuns qualifièrent à juste titre de « nomophilie » en ce qu'il n'était qu'une réponse névrotique, inconsciente et coupable à un catholicisme mal compris et que l'on avait à tort pris pour une doctrine qui avait fait passer l'esprit avant la règle alors qu'il ne cherchait qu'à accomplir le fait que la Règle ne pouvait avoir de force si elle n'était pas intégrée dans le cœur, l'âme, le corps et l'esprit de celui qui prétendait l'incarner - s'ajouta un souci d'égalité qui confondait l'égalité et l'impartialité et qui, mal compris lui aussi visait implicitement à remettre en cause l'autre dogme des Anciens : celui de la distinction et de l'élection de certains êtres¹.

Mais ces solutions ne pouvaient en être une ne serait-ce parce que la réaction n'est pas action mais aussi parce que la loi elle-même n'est qu'un moyen et qu'elle ne saurait être une fin en soi. En effet, d'une loi devenue centrale, le chemin vers une loi devenue source et fondement fut trouvé et avec lui le positivisme juridique qui, avec sa hiérarchie des normes rêva même d'inventer une théorie pure du droit supposant ainsi tout le reste impur peut-être ?

Le positivisme avait oublié que le droit (s'il est légitime en soi) ne peut se légitimer lui-même et nous l'avons vu, de plus et surtout il n'est pas composé par des normes mais par des approches a-normales au contraire puisque singulières.

Le droit est chemin personnel qui doit conduire à l'universel. De plus, il doit trouver sa source hors de lui ou plus profondément que lui. Quant à l'égalité, elle ne saurait être un principe rigide puisque nous sommes tous différents et que tous les hommes ne se valent pas. Elle ne doit pas être confondue avec l'identité et l'impartialité.

¹ Sur ce point, ce ne fut pas un hasard si Sieyès - avec son Essai sur les privilèges, fut comme J D Bredin l'écrivit la clef de la Révolution française. Voir la Revue française d'histoire des idées politiques, n 33 2011 dirigée par Pierre Yves Quiviger.

En effet, pour que la justice soit, il faut que le chemin droit de chacun puisse se trouver et pour cela, c'est la différence qui doit être redécouverte. De plus pour s'aider et aider autrui, il ne faut pas que chacun soit traité de manière égale. La prise en compte du singulier est, au contraire, la condition première du juste. Être juste, en effet, c'est depuis que Platon nous l'a rappelé « donner à chacun ce qui lui revient ». La justice est ainsi une forme de justesse qui appelle des discriminations continues et de plus en plus fines et elles-mêmes ne peuvent se révéler sans une vérité qui elle-même ne se dévoile que par étapes successives.

Pour y parvenir, il faut un gouvernement composé d'être capables eux-mêmes de se diriger dans les ténèbres et plus leurs lumières sont belles et fortes, plus elles doivent être élevées afin d'éclairer le plus grand nombre. En conséquence, toute forme de gouvernement a besoin de dirigeants et de magistrats à qui il faut accorder des privilèges tant leur pouvoir est hors du commun et tant il est nécessaire de les élever afin qu'ils éclairent le plus grand nombre et que leur lumière – toujours fragile telle une flamme qui oscille au vent – soit protégée des grands et des mauvais vents.

Enfin, pour qu'une société se constitue, il faut que les membres de celle-ci partagent des valeurs qui peuvent précisément leur permettre de déterminer l'inégal ou pour le dire autrement ; il faut que celle-ci établisse des critères communs de ce qu'est le pire et le meilleur et qu'elle indique ce qui pour elle passe en priorité. Les valeurs sont ce qui, par définition permettent de discriminer le bon grain de l'ivraie. Elles sont ce qui justement permettent de rappeler que tout n'est pas égal car celui qui s'exprime ainsi en français est celui à qui rien n'importe².

L'égalité ne pouvait donc – avec la loi- devenir des lumières. Erigées en dogmes, elles apportèrent, selon nous la confusion. Il ne fallait pas pour autant les rejeter en bloc.

Ne parvenant à trouver la médiane et, au lieu d'admettre ce point et d'affiner les analyses, notre pensée préféra maintenir une égalité de façade et favoriser une loi procédurale et devenue fin.

Corrélativement et afin de survivre, la philosophie se divisa peu à peu en trois branches : celle de la théorie, celle de l'action et celle du remède. Les femmes et hommes qui cherchaient à oeuvrer pour le mieux-être se séparèrent et certains allèrent du côté de la pensée, d'autres de l'action et d'autres se firent thérapeutes.

Cette division ne fit que les affaiblir plus encore et avec eux ce qui pouvait encore légitimer le droit et l'action de chacun. Elle ne fit que scléroser les disciplines et bloquer le dialogue. Fallait-il en effet que la philosophie ne soit qu'action ou remède ? Fallait-il qu'elle ne soit que pensée ou souci de guérison ?

² Référence ici au parler populaire qui, pour permettre à une personne de dire que rien n'importe, lui permet de dire « tout m'est égal ».

On se souvient du débat introduit par Arendt avec Marx et tout récemment celui de Sartre et Alain avec Freud. Les divisions et les querelles entre ceux qui voulaient agir et ceux qui voulaient penser ; entre ceux qui voulaient penser et ceux qui voulaient agir ne cessèrent d'agiter le monde des humanités³.

Faute d'échanges profonds et féconds entre ces trois branches de l'esprit humain et entre ce qui – selon nous ne se doit de former qu'un – à savoir le penser, le dé-penser et le panser – les discours s'appauvrirent et pour masquer cet appauvrissement, à l'idée de loi – jugée trop philosophique – succéda la notion de normes et un système construit autour de la science et d'un savoir technique se développa.

La norme orientée par l'action et le souci sans doute marxien de transformer le monde plutôt que de le penser, se fit de plus en plus présente, prégnante, technicienne et scientifique. Elle ne tira plus sa légitimité du principe philosophique pensé en tant que tel mais d'un discours technico-savant qui reposait exclusivement sur cette nouvelle idole que furent la science et la technique et leurs nouveaux prêtres : les savants et les ingénieurs.

En effet, après que les religions traditionnelles furent évincées, la croyance au progrès et en la force de la science et de la technique envahirent l'occident. L'une et l'autre colonisèrent un droit devenu lui-même « science juridique ».

Mais le remède fut une fois de plus de peu d'efficacité. En effet, rapidement, l'on se rendit à l'évidence du fait qu'être savant ne pouvait pas tout résoudre et que connaître par cœur tel ou tel théorème ne faisait pas de nous une « élite » au sens propre du terme. De plus, au lieu de concourir au progrès, la science fut à l'origine de multiples inventions qui favorisèrent l'émergence de guerres et de génocides de plus en plus violents, meurtriers et inhumains. Enfin, certains comprirent qu'il venait temps de recréer du lien entre toutes ces formes de l'être humain.

La science elle-même fut alors ré-interrogée et l'on se rendit peu à peu à l'évidence qu'il ne suffisait pas que des personnes soient intelligentes et instruites pour être exceptionnelles. Le savoir intellectuel ne garantissait pas un recul de la violence et ne favorisait pas nécessairement l'émergence du droit. L'un des peuples les plus savants d'Europe fut d'ailleurs complice de la pire des barbaries et – par le truchement de l'éthnologie et de l'archéologie – on se rendit à l'évidence que l'histoire n'était pas finie et que le primitif - ou celui que l'on considérait comme tel – en savait plus que l'occidental pouvait le croire.

³Sur ce point, on se souvient du célèbre propos liminaire de Arendt dans la crise de la culture. Trad P Levy Gallimard 1972 p.56. Reprochant à Marx d'avoir écrit que la philosophie devait transformer le monde au lieu de le penser, Arendt écrit : par le même processus, les idées platoniciennes perdirent leur pouvoir autonome d'illuminer le monde et l'univers. Elles devinrent d'abord ce qu'elles n'avaient pour Platon que dans leur relation avec le politique, des normes....

Cette vision d'un monde trop positif finit peu à peu par s'étioler et nous nous installâmes alors dans la situation contemporaine : celle d'une crise du positivisme scientifique. Cette crise avait cependant un sens profond qui conduisit à l'émergence d'un nouveau savoir : l'épistémologie qui se permettait de prendre du recul sur une science dont on commençait à douter.

On se mit alors à re-découvrir que l'intelligence pouvait avoir deux formes : l'une scientifique et intellectuelle ou politique et l'autre plus sensitive et plus proche du cœur.

On se dé-fia progressivement de certaines pensées et idées qualifiées d'idéologiques et pour les conjurer, le souci de neutralité devint la priorité dans le domaine du politique et juridique.

Le positivisme juridique devint alors le courant d'idées dominant dans le monde des juristes et du politique et la bureaucratie prit peu à peu la place des anciens partis politiques autrefois composés et conduits par des intellectuels.

Ces structures politiques – au moins en Europe continentale – changèrent de formes et se bureaucratèrent. L'administration devint un pouvoir à elle toute seule et les procédures normatives que celle-ci mettait en place devinrent de plus en plus conséquentes.

La notion de valeur se perdit peu à peu au profit d'un souci d'efficacité et de neutralité au moins affichée. Au souci du savoir succéda celui de la performance ; à celui du principe, celui de la règle.

La procédure devint première. Pour être le meilleur, il fallait ainsi avoir réussi des épreuves le plus souvent formelles et bien connaître les normes de recrutement. Il fallait être efficace et bien connaître les règles du groupe afin de mieux le contrôler. La norme fut envahie par la procédure et la procédure par la technique neutre.

Les valeurs intéressèrent de moins en moins et l'on consacra de moins en moins de temps à leur approfondissement. La confusion s'installa peu à peu et il devint de plus en plus difficile d'établir des priorités. Tout valait tout et l'on entra de plus en plus dans la forme d'un droit qui perdit toute colonne vertébrale apparente et ne se constituait plus que de multiples régimes et droits spéciaux qui se concurrençaient les uns les autres. Chaque « groupe » de techniciens et de savants pensait détenir les clefs du savoir et du pouvoir en exigeant sa dérogation et sa norme.

L'exception devint la règle et nous entrâmes peu à peu dans le monde des experts et des « spécialistes » et techniciens. Pour éviter que l'un prenne le dessus sur les autres, la séparation des normes se substitua à la logique de la séparation des pouvoirs car chaque « chef » de groupe ou de tendance scientifique permettait – avec son discours – de contredire tel et tel autre petit chef.

Chacun – sous l'influence de Kelsen – voulut sa logique et son système de normes. Ceux-ci s'empilèrent les uns sur les autres mais surtout, chacun put contredire la trop grande influence de l'autre et réciproquement.

A la séparation des pouvoirs imaginé par les Lumières pour garantir le pouvoir de la Loi et que l'on conservait en « façade », on substitua peu à peu – dans la réalité – un système de séparation des normes dont le principe était le suivant : face à l'inflation de normes et de groupes voulant la domination , pour qu'une norme n'ait pas trop de pouvoir, il fallait qu'une norme puisse en contredire une autre.

En d'autres termes, il était nécessaire de permettre aux magistrats de pouvoir disposer d'une batterie de textes afin d'adapter leurs décisions à la subtilité d'un monde complexe et ne pas se laisser bloquer par la trop grande généralité des lois.

Vu de l'extérieur, ce système fut assez peu compris et beaucoup évoquèrent une certaine inflation législative. L'adage « nul n'est censé ignorer la loi » parut perdre tout son sens. Le droit et le politique ne semblèrent plus être en mesure d'aider chacun à hiérarchiser ses priorités et organiser sa vie et à s'orienter dans celle-ci. A la confusion des valeurs s'ajouta une certaine confusion du droit.

Le droit – dans cette version post-moderne – eut alors de plus en plus de mal à se légitimer et avec lui, la légitimité des élites chargées de le mettre en oeuvre s'estompa de plus en plus. En effet, être spécialiste d'un domaine, bon connaisseur de telle ou telle procédure ne pouvait suffire à faire de vous un dirigeant et chacun commençait à s'en rendre compte.

Les médias occidentales appelèrent ce phénomène : écart de plus en plus grand entre le peuple et ses gouvernants. Le sentiment de corruption devint les « tartes à la crème » d'une certaine presse et – pour y remédier – les associations et les groupes contre la corruption se multiplièrent. L'éthique devint alors le maître mot. Chaque entreprise devait avoir son représentant sur le sujet et elle devint elle-même une discipline.

Le renouveau actuel de celle-ci peut donc s'expliquer par la crise que nous venons très rapidement d'évoquer : celle du scientisme et celle du positivisme juridique. En soi ce renouveau ne nous déplaît guère. Cependant celle-ci semble s'être elle-même inscrite dans la division évoquée plus avant entre « sphères » de la pensée, sphères de l'action et sphères de la guérison.

Or la thèse que nous souhaitons soutenir dans ce travail est qu'une telle division est contraire au projet même de l'éthique qui se doit d'être recherche et découverte du mieux-être. En effet pour y parvenir, il convient selon nous non seulement d'être dans la pensée, mais aussi et surtout d'être dans l'action puis ensuite dans la guérison de celle ci et de ses effets.

Pour re-construire, il nous semble important de de ré-unifier les trois axes de l'éthique. Une telle ré-unification est nécessaire afin de nous aider à retrouver des valeurs perdues. Une telle re-découverte est essentielle pour deux raisons :

– Au niveau contemporain, nous l'avons indiqué. La séparation actuelle des individus et des groupes est des plus périlleuse car elle ne cesse d'installer au pouvoir des êtres dans les différentes sphères. Or ceux-ci peuvent à tout moment devenir des tyrans et accabler ceux qui seraient sous leur pouvoir. La confusion actuelle des valeurs risque ainsi d'amplifier cette prolifération tyrannique que notre langage contemporain appelle : pervers narcissiques.

– Au niveau plus global, toutes les civilisations ont besoin de se créer des valeurs communes pour avancer de concert. A défaut, celles-ci régressent. Or lorsque la civilisation recule c'est la barbarie qui avance et avec elle le vide éthique qu'elle promeut.

De telles valeurs sont nécessaires si nous voulons reconstruire tous ces édifices de l'humain qui ne cessent d'être détruits peu à peu. Sans elles, la défiance s'installe et avec elle la guerre de tous contre tous. Il est en effet plus facile de se défier que de construire. Il est plus aisé d'être dans la défiance que dans la confiance.

Cependant, cette confiance ne se décrète pas. Elle se gagne et se re-gagne peu à peu et pourtant nul ne voit quel chemin à nouveau emprunter pour la faire naître ou renaître.

Alors, comment faire ? Comment expliquer et comprendre cette crise à la fois collective et donc aussi individuelle en ce qu'elle nous affecterait tous ? Comment à nouveau découvrir ce qui compte et importe plus que tout ?

Pour tenter de trouver quelque réponse à ces questions si essentielles selon nous, nos travaux nous ont conduits – comme nous le verrons plus après – à ré-interroger l'évolution que nous avons brièvement évoquée plus avant.

Voyant la rigidification du droit s'opérer, nous avons proposé dans un premier temps, de redonner sens au droit et de ne pas seulement admettre – comme les positivistes le font – que nous étions en présence de « droit » dès lors qu'il y avait existence d'une pyramide de normes. Pour ce faire, il nous a semblé plus juste de revenir à l'idée d'un droit qui ne pouvait être qualifié de tel s'il ne laissait pas sa place à l'un et à l'autre. Nous avons, en effet soutenu, qu'il ne pouvait y avoir droit que si celui-ci permettait de construire – concrètement et réellement – un espace pour l'un et pour l'autre⁴.

⁴ Pour approfondir la question, voir notre texte : Jean-Jacques Sarfati, *Le droit un espace pour l'un et pour l'autre*. Ed. Connaissances et savoirs. 2018.

Mais une telle proposition demeurait encore trop théorique. Elle n'offrait pas de vision d'ensemble de nos difficultés et ne permettait pas de trouver des solutions pour le présent et le futur. De plus, elle ne permettait pas encore suffisamment d'explorer le sens profond - et perdu selon nous – de ce noble concept de « droit ».

Comment, en effet, faire vivre au quotidien ce droit désormais considéré idéalement comme un espace de cohabitation et de coexistence des contraires ou des opposés ?

Ce fut alors qu'il nous parut nécessaire d'envisager qu'un tel droit ne pourrait réellement exister que si d'une part, il était servi par des magistrats dignes – au quotidien - de le réaliser concrètement et si, au quotidien, il devenait possible pour le peuple également de bénéficier d'un tel droit dans sa vie de tous les jours. Un droit ne pourrait en effet se légitimer que s'il devenait réellement droit et s'il apparaissait comme tel aux yeux de nos concitoyens.

Pour y parvenir, il lui fallait s'améliorer et il ne pourrait, selon nous, y parvenir s'il ne faisait pas très rapidement travailler les « vrais » meilleurs et non ceux qui n'en présentaient que l'apparence.

Mais qui pourrait ainsi bénéficier de cette couronne ? Il convenait donc de s'interroger sur la question des meilleurs et de savoir comment ce meilleur pouvait s'obtenir, ce qu'il pouvait être. Mais ce souci d'enseignement et de recherche éthique ne pouvait seulement toucher l'élite.

Que serait en effet une élite qui serait formée (et sélectionnée) en vue de l'accomplissement d'un mieux qu'elle incarnerait si seule la formation de celle-ci était pensée et si celle du peuple était ignorée ?

Une telle élite – certes bien formée et bien éduquée - finirait bien vite par s'isoler, par se couper des autres et peu à peu, son discours finirait par ne plus être compris. A terme même, celle-ci perdrait le nom d'élite. Quel est en effet le rôle de celle-ci dans une société si ce n'est d'élever l'ensemble au meilleur ? Or pourquoi pourrait-elle encore se qualifier comme telle si son seul mérite consisterait dans le fait de bien connaître telle ou telle procédure propre à lui permettre d'accéder à tel ou tel temple du pouvoir ? De plus, que serait un droit qui serait noble et respectueux en théorie mais qui ne parviendrait jamais à exister en pratique ?

Un tel système ne pourrait à terme que conduire à ce que Platon appelait la misologie ou haine du discours. Or il n'est rien de pire qu'un groupe qui cesse de croire aux vertus de l'échange car il risque - plus rapidement que les autres - de se déliter.

En conséquence, pour que le droit se légitime à nouveau, il est nécessaire que les meilleurs de nos concitoyens fassent advenir le meilleur pour tous. Mais ce meilleur quel est-il ?

C'est ce que nous pourrions considérer comme étant le mieux de l'être, ce qu'il peut atteindre de plus « conséquent » en tous les sens du terme et selon l'espace et le temps qui est le sien.

Dans la tradition de la pensée occidentale, ce qui touche à la recherche du mieux de l'être concerne un savoir que l'on appelle l'éthique. Nous l'avons déjà indiqué. C'est la raison pour laquelle notre projet et nos travaux ont donc été dirigés vers cet aspect des humanités qui nous a paru essentiel. Nous avons rapidement conclu au fait que pour que le droit soit droit, il devait reposer sur une éthique concrète.

Restait à tenter de délimiter le mieux-être. Pour tenter d'y aboutir, il convenait de revenir sur l'être lui-même. Pour y parvenir, il fallait un but et un outil et celui-ci ne pouvait – selon nous - qu'être celui de la distinction. Pourquoi et comment considérer la distinction ?

Distinguer ce n'est pas séparer mais ce n'est pas non plus tout confondre. La distinction est donc, selon nous, un juste milieu, entre la séparation et la confusion. Elle met chaque chose à sa place sans l'éloigner du reste.

Ce n'est en effet qu'en mettant les êtres à la place qui leur convient le mieux que l'on peut obtenir ce qu'il y a de meilleur pour eux et pour l'ensemble. C'est également en trouvant la place de chacun que la justesse s'obtient. C'est en ce sens qu'il faut comprendre, selon nous, cette vieille sentence rappelée par Platon au début de la République suivant laquelle « le juste est le fait de donner à chacun ce qui lui revient ».

Ce juste est ici le propre de l'éthique et celle-ci ne peut donc – selon nous – se réaliser que par le biais de la distinction mais comment distinguer et quoi distinguer ? Tout ce, répondrons-nous, qui permet à notre tête, notre corps et notre cœur d'aller mieux ou d'aller vers le mieux.

Mais comment atteindre cet objectif ? Pour y parvenir, il nous a d'abord fallu examiner ce qu'était le pire et comment il s'installait.

Le pire, selon nos analyses, s'installe toujours par des systèmes de cercles que l'on appelle vicieux et qui – par des logiques de destruction continue – enfoncent de plus en plus l'être vers le néant. Or le néant est ce vers quoi nous nous rabaissons et non ce vers quoi nous nous élevons. Il réduit l'être : de négations en négations, de rabaissements en rabaissements, il éloigne peu à peu du meilleur et du bien.

Pour lutter contre les cercles vicieux, la seule logique est de leur substituer progressivement le seul contraire qui leur soit efficace à savoir les cercles que l'on appelle vertueux. Alors que les cercles vicieux ramènent vers le bas et le pire, les cercles vertueux permettent d'élever progressivement et contrer le mouvement infernal du cercle vicieux et de ces enchaînements mortifères.

Mais comment concrètement mettre en place des cercles vertueux, telle est la seule question conséquente, selon nous ?

Pour y parvenir, il convient d'être dans la distinction et donc remettre chaque chose à sa place. Nous l'avons indiqué.

Cette remise en place doit intégrer trois dimensions : l'approche théorique ou le « penser » ; l'approche appliquée ou « le dé-penser » et enfin l'approche thérapeutique ou le « panser ».

Ces trois dimensions permettent ainsi le mieux d'un être qui ne peut se confondre avec le soi et qui intègre ainsi l'autre. En effet, la pensée est essentiellement ce qui permet d'éclaircir ce qui est en soi.

Le dé-penser ou l'agir est ce qui permet de partir de soi pour aller vers l'autre. Enfin le « panser » est ce qui permet de corriger le soi et celui de l'autre lorsqu'ils ont été abîmés et plongés ainsi dans ce vide de l'abîme.

Tout au long de nos prochains travaux, nous expliquerons ce que nous entendons par ces concepts qui sont essentiels dans notre approche de l'éthique par la distinction.

Toutefois, à ce stade de notre étude, il importe d'indiquer que généralement, ces trois approches sont séparées ou sont confondues dans l'esprit du public mais aussi souvent dans l'esprit de certains penseurs. De plus, elles ne sont pas assez hiérarchisées alors que, selon nous, un ordre peut s'imposer entre chacune d'elles.

En effet, malgré l'importance que nous accordons à la pensée et à la guérison, il nous semble qu'elles sont secondaires par rapport à l'action. Malgré l'importance que nous accordons à la pensée, elle est moindre par rapport au panser.

Ce qui est premier en valeur (le temps axiologique) ne l'est pas toujours dans le temps (chronologique). Or ces deux types de temporalité sont trop souvent confondues. Dans leur logique, elles sont même opposées. En effet dans le temps axiologique c'est la guérison qui prime puis vient l'action puis vient la pensée. En effet, une société n'est pas digne de ce nom, selon nous, si elle ne consacre pas toute son énergie à éviter ce qui est cassé et à le réparer et le reconstruire. Cependant, il y a reconstruction et reconstruction et celui qui veut oeuvrer sans pensée ne fait que s'agiter. En conséquence avant de guérir, il faut vouloir oeuvrer et agir et avant d'agir il faut penser. En conséquence, dans le temps chronologique c'est la pensée qui est première, vient ensuite l'action puis la guérison.

Jusqu'à présent ces deux temps n'ont pas été assez distingués et jusqu'à présent, ces trois approches de l'être humain n'ont pas été assez reliées entre elles. Tel est notre projet dans ce modeste travail et c'est par l'éthique de la distinction que nous entendons opérer ce lien.

Pas d'oeuvre éthique, en effet selon nous, sans pensée préalable, sans action qui suivrait et sans correction de cette action. L'éthique se situe donc dans ces trois gestes (curieusement unis par les mots) du penser, du dé-penser et du panser. Le « penser » est généralement associé à la tête, le dé-penser au corps et le panser au cœur.

Agir éthiquement suppose donc – selon nous – de prime abord une clarification des mots, des idées et des concepts ainsi que des sentiments et des désirs puis ensuite une réalisation de ceux qui permettront d'aller vers le meilleur et enfin une correction pour gommer ce qui n'allait pas dans notre action. Mais il n'est pas d'agir éthique sans pensée du même nom ni rectification adaptée et pour cela il convient le plus souvent possible d'être dans la distinction. Cette distinction n'est toujours elle-même qu'un projet et un idéal.

Or il y a trois types de distinctions : la distinction conceptuelle qui s'effectue par la pensée et permet de clarifier les idées ; l'agir distingué qui ne confond ni les êtres ni les choses et la correction qui permet de distinguer ce qui va dans le sens du meilleur et ce qui l'interdit afin de conserver l'un et se débarrasser de l'autre.

L'éthique est ainsi, à ce titre, un chemin. Elle n'est jamais finie ni même aboutie. Nous avons toujours à faire « de notre mieux » et pour cela toujours oeuvrer dans ces trois directions qui doivent être liées.

Le mieux se distingue ainsi du bien, il n'est pas figé. Il est toujours susceptible d'être dépassé – et surtout corrigé- puisqu'il n'est d'ailleurs toujours qu'en situation. En effet, à la différence du bien, il ne se pense qu'en situation. Il renvoie en effet à ce qu'il est possible de faire de mieux dans la situation donnée.

Vouloir le mieux, c'est ainsi l'espérer, le rechercher et toujours se corriger pour s'améliorer progressivement et pour cela toujours enlever ce qui était en trop ou ajouter lorsqu'il y avait un manque.

Comme Aristote l'a d'ailleurs constaté en son temps, le vice s'installe toujours à partir de l'excès de trop ou de trop peu. Le meilleur, comme nous le développerons plus après est donc toujours médian et ce terme de « médian » est essentiel dans notre éthique. Le médian est en effet, à la fois le moyen et la fin de la distinction.

En conséquence si la matière est l'éthique, le projet le mieux-être avec mise en évidence du meilleur ; si l'outil est la distinction, la démarche doit viser le médian.

Pour trouver ce médian, il faut chercher ce qui n'est ni trop gras ni trop maigre ; ce qui contient juste ce qu'il faut – ni trop ni trop peu – pour faire médiation entre les extrêmes. Cette médiation est essentielle car elle interdit la mise en place de ces cercles vicieux qui se créent lorsque chacun de ces opposés se trouve en face de l'autre.

Ce face à face les nourrit l'un et l'autre et en même temps les détruit l'un l'autre. En effet, au lieu de s'accorder ces extrêmes s'opposent et se nourrissent de la fin de l'autre. Il faut donc les maintenir ensemble en leur évitant de se manger mutuellement. C'est ce que permet le médian qui nourrit l'un et l'autre en se nourrissant des deux sans pour autant les détruire.

Le médian est toujours ce qu'il est possible de faire de mieux car il comprend les opposés et ne les détruit pas. Il est ce qui assure ainsi progressivement l'amélioration en évitant l'excès de trop ou de trop peu. Il est ce qui permet d'aller vers la justesse.

Il n'est cependant pas aisé de le distinguer au milieu de tout ce qui se présente à nous et Aristote n'a peut-être pas suffisamment à notre connaissance pensé le lien qui unit ces trois axes de l'éthique.

La difficulté de la tâche vient du fait notamment que, de même que dans la nature, les mauvaises herbes ressemblent aux belles herbes ; de même que les fruits vénéneux prennent la forme des fruits délicieux, il est souvent bien difficile de distinguer le temps qui convient et l'oeuvre qu'il conviendra de lui apporter pour progresser et ajouter au bien et ainsi créer le mieux.

La recherche de ce mieux appelle cependant et continuellement à cette vigilance qui permet d'éviter à tout moment au cercle vicieux de poursuivre son chemin et de nous conduire vers la détérioration.

L'amélioration elle-même est un juste milieu mais deux opposés extrêmes prennent souvent sa place et se font passer pour elle et nous les confondons souvent avec elle. Ces deux extrêmes sont la perfection d'un côté et la destruction de l'autre. L'un et l'autre ont des atouts et ils jouent de l'un et de l'autre pour nous convaincre de nous conduire vers le meilleur.

Cependant, ni l'une ni l'autre n'y conduisent selon nous. L'amélioration ne peut être – pour l'homme limité – l'obtention de la perfection mais il ne peut être destruction de tout ce qu'il a entrepris et qui contient toujours en lui une part de bien.

L'éthique de la distinction doit donc aider à la mise en place de personnes qui serviront à effectuer des médiations continues et qui seront justement en mesure de comprendre les opposés. Mais elle doit également aider tout un chacun à trouver par lui-même et en lui-même les dites médiations. Ce n'est qu'en les installant que le mieux s'installe car il chasse ce pire de l'excès, de la démesure et des folies de toutes sortes.

Pour y parvenir, il faut donc selon nous relier trois aspects de l'éthique qui ont été trop souvent séparés – nous l'avons indiqué – l'aspect théorique appelé méta-éthique, l'aspect pratique, appelé éthique appliquée et l'aspect thérapeutique trop souvent relégué au niveau du seul médical.

Pour autant, il ne s'agit ni de confondre la philosophie avec l'action, ni avec l'acte de guérison. Cependant pour réussir, nous avons longtemps pensé qu'il fallait diviser. Cette division des sphères du savoir n'a, selon nous, pas été la solution. Elle contenait toutefois un aspect positif. Elle a permis aux personnes plutôt « douées » pour un sujet plutôt que pour tel autre, d'approfondir leurs dons. De plus, elle a permis d'approfondir les connaissances sur ces différents champs.

Cependant notre idée est de soutenir qu'il convient de laisser chacun à sa place et qu'en aucune manière - le philosophe qui reste du côté de la tête et du penser- ne peut prétendre prendre la place des acteurs qui sont du côté du dé-penser. Il ne peut guère

plus se substituer aux guérisseurs qui sont dans le domaine du panser. Mais le philosophe doit pourtant créer des ponts entre ces trois branches de l'humanité.

Tel est l'objectif de ce texte. Pour y parvenir, l'éthique par la distinction, nous l'avons indiqué, cherche une voie médiane. Entre ceux qui renoncent à tout idéal et toute action et ceux qui dénoncent par idéalisme, elle a tenté une approche qui vise l'acquiescement.

L'acquiescement est un médian entre le renoncement et la dénonciation. Acquiescer c'est prendre acte de ce qui est afin de faire de son mieux dans les conditions qui sont les nôtres afin de réduire la part négative de cette réalité.

Cette domination des extrêmes trouve, selon nous, dans la sphère philosophique, son origine chez Platon et son allégorie de la caverne. Enseigné sous un certain angle, une telle philosophie enseigne en effet la peur du philosophe à l'égard de l'action et de la correction. En pensée contemporaine, nous le verrons c'est chez Arendt que nous retrouvons cette même fascination par ce qu'elle nomme la *vita contemplativa contre la vita activa*.

Notre projet n'est plus de penser contre mais avec. De plus, il n'est plus d'ignorer avec ces deux approches celle de la *vita correctiva*. Il n'est pas non plus de confondre la primauté chronologique de la philosophie de la pensée avec la primauté axiologique de la guérison à apporter à ce qui souffre.

Pourtant, le repli monastique dans le contemplatif a engendré deux extrêmes : d'un côté un mépris profond de la vie terrestre et de l'autre une adoration profonde de celle-ci. En effet, ceux qui s'éloignent trop idéalisent et ceux qui idéalisent finissent par s'éloigner.

Ces deux approches extrêmes – fondées sur la peur ou une envie de s'éloigner du monde réel par la pensée – se sont alimentées mutuellement en subsistant le combat au débat ; le pugilat à l'échange ; la fuite à la rencontre.

Selon nous, la philosophie doit sortir de cette peur – et de cette logique du combat – en re-construisant des médiations et en ayant présent à l'esprit le souci de ces deux excellences mises en évidence par Aristote, dans ce maître livre qu'est l'éthique à Nicomaque.

Dans ce texte, en effet, le stagirite met en évidence deux vertus (ou *arété*) : -d'un côté, en effet, il vante le courage qui est la juste prise de risque ; et de l'autre, il met en valeur, la prudence qui est la juste non prise de risque.

Faire preuve tout autant de courage que de prudence, tel doit être le projet de toute éthique qui implique la distinction et qui se situe dans une logique d'acquiescement. Pour lui, contrairement à ce qu'Arendt a pu soutenir, l'idéal n'est pas dans une vie monastique ou contemplative. Il pourrait selon nous plutôt se situer dans une contempl-action que possèdera l'homme droit et cette contempl-action n'est rien si elle ne guérit pas.

Pour y parvenir, il convient effectivement et concrètement de savoir distinguer le temps pour penser, le temps pour agir et le temps pour guérir. A l'image du projet évoqué par Salomon dans l'Ecclesiaste, le projet éthique est ainsi celui qui – au cœur de l'action- distingue pour chaque moment le temps qui lui correspond. Il est celui qui saisit – parmi les humains – et avec clarté et bienveillance celui qui devra accomplir la tâche qu'il conviendra d'accomplir et à qui il convient de donner ce qui lui revient : à untel la pensée, à tel autre l'action et à tel autre la guérison.

Dans ce cadre, l'objectif éthique devient alors celui d'une exigence de sa-voir voir et de savoir agir et corriger. Elle doit distinguer quand il faut agir et quand il faut penser ou panser.

Il importe ainsi de distinguer le temps adapté à chacun de ces trois axes de l'éthique et ce afin d'accompagner en cessant le sur-plomb.

Regarder en surplomb en français c'est regarder de haut. Il convient d'abandonner ce regard hautain pour plus de proximité. Mais le sur-plomb c'est aussi de la lourdeur en plus, du plomb en plus et ainsi l'éloignement de l'autre, de celui qui ne saisit pas notre approche.

Il faut en effet comprendre que tout le monde n'est pas philosophe et que la philosophie ne saurait se situer au-dessus des autres savoirs. Selon nous, en ce que son point dominant demeure la pensée, la philosophie se doit d'être seconde par rapport à une éthique qu'elle se doit de servir. Cette attitude de sur-plomb qui est souvent la sienne n'est parfois rien d'autre, qu'une fuite de la réalité et une peur de celle-ci. Elle est surtout ignorance de ce qui prime qui demeure l'action en vue de faire advenir le meilleur de l'être, par étapes successives et finement pensées et surtout ensuite la guérison que ne saurait oublier celui qui vise au mieux.

Dans cette optique, la distinction s'assimile avec la justesse qui est l'excellence du juste. Or, dans l'éthique à Nicomaque, Aristote a souligné combien la justesse était bien difficile à obtenir – plus difficile encore que l'acte de guérir. Ce n'est d'ailleurs pas un hasard – si celui-ci a terminé son éthique en appelant à travailler sur le politique qui la conditionnait.

Mais pourquoi soutenir que la guérison du malade était moins difficile à obtenir que la justesse et l'éthique par excellence ? Pourquoi Aristote, selon nous, a-t-il tenu un tel propos ? Il est possible d'ores et déjà cependant de considérer qu'il pressentait qu'au fond cette guérison était la fin première de tout projet éthique qui ne peut être que re-constructeur dans sa dimension axiologique.

Ce texte est donc le produit de nos dernières recherches et de nos essais pratiques sur la question. Il mérite lui-même d'être pansé, retravaillé, re-ajusté mais pour qu'il puisse l'être, il convient de prime abord qu'il devienne une réalité. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous avons décidé de le publier en étant conscient de ses limites, des retouches qu'il nécessitera et des erreurs qu'il contiendra nécessairement.