What are we doing when we do philosophy? A critical engagement with the limits of philosophical practice via Foucault, Deleuze and Laruelle

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Abstract

In this mini-dissertation I argue that the disenchantment of philosophy – the extraction of the remnants of its idealist and transcendent metaphysical core – is not just possible, but also ethically important and existentially advantageous. I interrogate the claims of philosophy to a status it does not warrant and put forward a revised account of what we are actually doing when we *do* philosophy. To begin, I examine Foucault's work, with a focus on the early archaeological period in which he describes various epistemes that serve to situate the forms, contents and interrelations of knowledge practices within specific power-knowledge assemblages. While Foucault does not apply his archaeological or genealogical methodologies to philosophy itself in a sustained way, we can employ them to perform an initial delimitation of philosophy, viewing it as an open set of imbricated heterogeneous practices taking the form of various singular historically situated diagrams. I then turn to Deleuze and his critique of the 'dogmatic image of thought', which gives rise, he argues, to the various transcendent illusions philosophy has long laboured under. Developing Gilbert Simondon's philosophy of *ontogenesis*, Deleuze eschews the ontological primacy of identity in favour of becoming and difference without identity. Difference, for Deleuze, should be seen not as a simple dialectical reversal of said primacy, but instead as a constant process of self-differing wherein we seek to encounter being and thought in their genesis, as complex processes of actualisation and counter-actualisation. I argue that this account is rigorously immanent and materialist and proposes a view of thinking as a *shock to thought*. Finally, I examine the work of François Laruelle and his project of *non-philosophy*. Non-philosophy argues that all philosophy begins with what Laruelle calls *the Philosophical Decision*. This is a deceptive have-your-cake-and-eat-it move whereby philosophers determine philosophy's relation to the Real through an initial decision about how to think the split between thought and what it reflects on and then redeploy this split-structure philosophically as a description of the inherent traction a given philosophy has on the Real through the mending of this split. In closing, I argue that Foucault, Deleuze and Laruelle each develop, in their own way, a critique of philosophy that acts on behalf of real, living beings and against the domination of any abstract principle that would separate life from its radical immanence.

Keywords: Michel Foucault, Gilbert Simondon, Gilles Deleuze, François Laruelle, meta-philosophy, non-philosophy, ontogenesis

Introduction

The philosopher Nick Land, in an essay written before his reactionary turn, reminds us that we should "not forget that philosophy is also primate psychology; that our loftiest speculations are merely picking through a minuscule region of the variegated slime encrusting a speck of dust" (Land 2011:178). Similarly, in *Nihil Unbound*, Ray Brassier argues that we should disabuse ourselves of the idea that philosophy is primarily "a sop to the pathetic twinge of human self-esteem" (Brassier 2007:xi). Accounts such as these can feel unsettlingly at odds with our common-sense or 'folk psychological' (Churchland 1984:73) image of philosophy as the grand pursuit of universal truths or perennial wisdom. It is also the case, however, that philosophy has historically tended to elide or downplay accounts of its modest material origins in favour of various problematic appeals to transcendent anthropocentrism and idealist hubris. What new form of thinking could result from the eradication of this hubris, and what would provide the necessary impetus for us to even consider undertaking such a task? Does such an approach necessarily result in the reduction of reflective thought to the psychological vicissitudes of human beings? Is it a relativist dead-end? More pressingly, can we usefully describe a materialist – and immanent – philosophy, shorn of its vestigial metaphysical baggage, without resigning ourselves to forms of near-tautological reductionism that lack any useful explanatory capacity vis-à-vis our lived experience as thinking beings inhabiting a world?

In this mini-dissertation, I argue that the disenchantment of philosophy – the extraction of the remnants of its idealist and transcendent metaphysical core – is not just possible, but also ethically important and existentially advantageous, for the reason that when we view philosophy in its broader social and world-historical contexts, we can observe the close proximity philosophical reasoning has had to power and the circumscription of knowledge and action in the world. In short, the practice of philosophy has had serious *consequences* for life. To the extent, then, that philosophy tacitly employs various *a priori* determinations of the relationship between philosophy and life (via such mechanisms as *empirico-transcendental doublets* (Foucault), *the dogmatic image of thought* (Deleuze), *the Principle of Sufficiency of*

Philosophy (Laruelle) and various other tendentious claims to traction over the real that haunt its history), we should interrogate its claims to a status it does not warrant and seek a revised account of what we are actually doing – and could be doing – when we *do* philosophy. I offer one cursory approach to such a project through the application of three increasingly severe delimitations of the scope and status of philosophy: two from inside what is traditionally understood as philosophy and one from within the field of non-standard philosophy.

To begin, I examine Foucault's work, with a focus on the early archaeological period, specifically *The Order of Things* (Foucault 2002a) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 2002b), in which he describes various epistemes – distributions of the visible (discursive) and sayable (non-discursive) that serve to situate the forms, contents and interrelations of knowledge practices within specific power-knowledge assemblages. While Foucault does not apply his archaeological or genealogical methodologies to philosophy itself in a sustained way, we can – following his careful application of these practices in limning various historically discrete arrangements of various aspects of life, labour and language in different times and places – employ them to perform an initial delimitation of philosophy, viewing it as an open set of imbricated heterogeneous practices taking the form of various singular historically situated diagrams.

I then turn to Deleuze and his critique of the 'dogmatic image of thought' – which gives rise, he argues, to the various transcendent illusions philosophy has long laboured under – as elaborated primarily in *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 2004). Developing the work of Gilbert Simondon, a highly influential philosopher of science and technology who developed, in works such as *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information* (Simondon 2020) – a philosophy of ontogenesis, or how being and thought come to be – Deleuze eschews the ontological primacy of identity in favour of difference without identity. Difference, for Deleuze, should be seen not as a simple dialectical reversal of said primacy, but instead as a constant process of self-differing wherein (following Simondon) we seek to encounter being and thought in their genesis, as complex, iterative, multiplicitous processes of actualisation and counter-actualisation (Deleuze 2004). I argue that this account, which is described in detail in the later chapters of *Difference and Repetition*, and which reappears in modified form in the late co-authored work *What is Philosophy?* (Deleuze and Guattari 1994), is rigorously immanent and

materialist, and proposes a view of thinking as a shock to thought (Deleuze 2004:132) that gestures towards contemporary neurobiological accounts of cognition.

Moving further afield, I proceed to examine the work of lesser-known contemporary thinker François Laruelle, who has since the 1970s been developing a provocative and theoretically immensely rich project that he terms *non-philosophy*. Non-philosophy (or *non-standard philosophy*, as it has more recently been termed by analogy with non-Euclidean geometry) argues that all philosophy begins with what Laruelle calls *the Philosophical Decision* (Laruelle 2013a). This is a deceptive have-your-cake-and-eat-it move whereby philosophers determine philosophy's relation to the Real through an initial decision about how to think the split between thought and what it reflects on – as the immanent and the transcendent, for instance – and then redeploy this split-structure philosophically as a description of the inherent traction a given philosophy has on the Real through the mending of this split. This form of philosophical reasoning, whereby philosophy mistakes its own *a posteriori* bridging of the theoretical split it has effected within thought for a bridge between thought and the Real, is a move to which philosophy remains constitutively blind. Laruelle claims that this self-delusion of thought, which gives rise to what he terms the *Principle of Sufficiency of Philosophy* (vis-à-vis the Real), performs a kind of ethical violence by granting philosophy illegitimate authority over the human-in-person, i.e., the radical immanence of life as lived. If philosophers have merely interpreted the philosophical relation to the Real in various circular ways, the point is to change its nature by removing its Principle of Sufficiency in order to render it a simple material that can be employed, via non-philosophical practices of underdetermination and in service of ordinary humans, instead of humans being overdetermined by any given philosophy.

In closing, I briefly respond to the claim that the radical delimitation of thinking by Foucault, Deleuze and Laruelle results in a drastically impoverished role for thought and, by extension, philosophy, leading to a relativist impasse. I argue that this profound disenchantment of philosophy, which renders it a generic, historically situated, creative material behaviour that has no special position vis-à-vis other forms of thought, in fact allows us to dramatically expand the scope of what thinking can be and to welcome multiple forms of thought that do not map to our anachronistic folk-psychological descriptions. Finally, this view allows us to recognise Foucault, Deleuze and Laruelle as deploying their challenges to – and recreation of – philosophy

on behalf of real, living beings and against the domination of any abstract principle that would separate life from its radical immanence.

1. Foucault and the finitude of philosophy

> *The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.* (Foucault 1984:50)

1.1 Introduction

Foucault's work is commonly divided into three periods: the archaeological, genealogical and ethical. Of these, the mid-era genealogical period of the 1970s, in which Foucault develops his famous analysis of power in *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, is by far the best known. It is closely tailed by the posthumously published 1970s and early 1980s lecture series in which this analysis is further developed into a discussion of pastoral power, governmentality, neoliberal subjectivity and the ethics of self-care. This focus on the later work[1] has led to a popular conception of Foucault as primarily a radical social or political theorist, or as a historian of the different ways in which relations between knowledge and power have operated in different periods via historically situated dispositifs – heterogeneous apparatuses or ensembles through which power flows, and which consist "of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions" (Foucault 1980:194). While this aspect of Foucault's work has been employed to great effect to critically examine contemporary power relations, it in fact relies substantially on the earlier archaeological work undertaken in the 1960s and early 1970s in *History of Madness*, *The Order of Things* (2002a) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002b). Upon closer reading, the so-

[1] See, for instance, the focus of the majority of the work published in the *Foucault Studies* journal.

called 'three periods' represent a progressive enhancement and reiteration of the same conceptual architecture which is deployed across his oeuvre in the development of "the specifically modern philosophical question: what is there that is contingent and local in the apparently necessary and universal?" (Falzon and O'Leary 2010:5). It is this earlier work, in which Foucault exhaustively demonstrates and defines his project, that is of interest here, both because it provides the theoretical underpinnings for a coherent understanding of his entire project and because it represents Foucault's most sustained engagement with philosophy. Indeed, a significant part of *The Order of Things* is spent responding to Kant's critical philosophy and grappling with the limitations of phenomenology, existentialism, positivism and structuralism[2], primarily in order to pose fundamental questions about the production, scope and contingency of knowledge, albeit in a manner that often seems closer to historiography than philosophy *proper*[3]. In this section, therefore, I will engage with Foucault as a philosopher, examining the key questions he raises in his early work – specifically those pertaining to the finitude of human knowledge and the historical contingency of the production of thought and subjectivity – as well as exploring how grappling with these questions leads Foucault to transform his conception of what philosophy is and does. Foucault does not explicitly turn his critical archaeological lens to philosophy itself in any kind of sustained manner, but prefers to examine topics like medicine, linguistics, economics and the life sciences. Nevertheless, I argue that this is a natural implication of his work, and that we can employ his methodology to diagram the situatedness of philosophy, in the most general sense of this term, in various heterogeneous *epistemes*. As will become clear, an episteme is for Foucault "the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities" (Foucault 2002b:211). Georges Canguilhem describes this as "a humus on which only certain forms of discursive organization can grow, and for which the confrontation with other forms cannot arise from a value judgment" (Canguilhem 2006:87) in order to examine how it has functioned differently and remained non-identical to itself in different places and periods, exhibiting the same kinds of continuities, discontinuities

[2] This is a label popularly applied to Foucault, but it is one, like 'poststructuralism' that he explicitly distanced himself from on several occasions.

[3] Indeed, Foucault at least once asks himself whether what he is doing should be considered philosophy or instead some other, yet to be defined practice. As Falzon and O'Leary note, Foucault "reflects that despite his early training in the 'great philosophical machines' of Hegelianism and phenomenology, he doesn't consider himself to be a philosopher, nor does he think his work either recommends a way of doing, or of not doing, philosophy" (2010:4). While Foucault of course did train as a philosopher, writing a dissertation on Hegel and translating a work by Kant as part of these studies, he is perhaps best understood, especially in later years, as a quintessential French public intellectual.

and ruptures Foucault observes in the fields that form the focus on his analysis. Instead of seeing philosophy as the slow accumulation of knowledge and concomitant truth claims about various fundamental aspects of the world, this view leads us to conceive of the production of philosophical knowledge as deeply historically and contextually imbricated, immanent to a particular historical field or episteme, and transforming in complex ways across epistemes in a non-teleological manner.

To begin, I will provide a summary of the archaeological project, focusing on *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the text that marks the end of the early period and the beginning of a long publication silence, at the end of which lies the more famous work on power. This will include a brief examination of Foucault's status as a philosopher, as well as his intellectual debt to philosopher of science Gaston Bachelard and his successor – and one of Foucault's examiners – Canguilhem, a historian of science. I will then turn to a close reading of *The Order of Things*, with specific reference to Foucault's 'analytic of finitude' – a remarkable reflection on the production of knowledge of self and world that represents Foucault at his philosophical heights and forms the bedrock for the later work, which details the core ethical principles of a situated freedom and a becoming otherwise than ourselves. These principles in fact define Foucault's entire oeuvre and implicitly challenge practices like philosophy to reflect on their role in the production of specific relations of knowledge and power that seek to exhaustively delimit the visible and the sayable; and to perform a hidden violence on the scope of human possibility while being unable to ever fully ground or justify their foundational claims.

1.2 Foucault's own philosophical episteme

As Gary Gutting observes, "Foucault himself emphasized the importance of Bachelard and Canguilhem not only for French thought in general but also for his own intellectual orientation" (Gutting 1989:9). Foucault furthermore argued that they, along with figures like logician and philosopher of mathematics Jean Cavaillès, offered an alternative to the "philosophy of experience, of meaning, of the subject" that was exemplified by Husserl (phenomenology), Sartre (existentialism) and Merleau-Ponty (structuralism/phenomenology) by providing "a

philosophy of knowledge[4], of rationality, and of the concept" (Foucault 1978:x). We should therefore understand early Foucault as working in the tradition of philosophy of science, broadly speaking, and not within any of the aforementioned philosophical registers which were dominant in French philosophy in the mid-20th century, but which were (as Foucault remarks) "quite profoundly heterogeneous" to his own framework (ibid.). Indeed, Bachelard and Canguilhem were far more interested in "substituting for the primacy of experienced or reflexive consciousness the primacy of concepts, systems, or structures" (Canguilhem 2006:92), and sought to explore the historical role of scientific concepts, as well as the various continuities and discontinuities marking scientific history[5], without seeking to ground them in a transcendental subject or the immediacy of lived experience. In perhaps his most succinct formulation of this approach, which forms the fertile soil from which the project undertaken in *The Order of Things* is grown, Foucault observes how "the work of Koyré, Bachelard, Cavaillès, and Canguilhem" poses significant critical questions to naïve philosophical views of the Enlightenment, and "to a rationality that claims to be universal even while it develops in a contingent manner", relying upon "a reason whose structural autonomy carried with it the history of dogmatisms and despotisms" (Foucault 1978:xii). In a nod to his own project, Foucault continues that in order to remain faithful to Enlightenment principles, we need to view this reason as producing "emancipation only on the condition that it succeeds in freeing itself from itself" (ibid.:xii). While Bachelard and Canguilhem were primarily interested in this emancipatory project within the context of scientific reason[6], we can observe the implications of the self-overcoming of sedentary reason through an interrogation of its enmeshment in the present for philosophical thought. Gary Gutting clarifies an argument Bachelard makes *in The New Scientific Spirit* (Bachelard 1984) and observes that Descartes's view "that science must be grounded in clear and distinct intuitions of the essential properties of matter … is refuted by the fact that matter, as described by twentieth-century physics and chemistry, is simply not available to our intellectual intuition" and is instead known "only through the indirections of

[4] Foucault uses the related French terms 'savoir' and 'connaissance', both of which are translated into English as 'knowledge'; in French, however, they have subtly distinct meanings that are unfortunately lost in translation. "By connaissance I mean the relation of the subject to the object and the formal rules that govern it. Savoir refers to the conditions that are necessary in a particular period for this or that type of object to be given to connaissance and for this or that enunciation to be formulated" (Foucault 2002b:16).

[5] "Often … the effect of a break is presented as global, affecting the totality of a scientific work. But we need to know how to uncover, even in the work of a single historical figure, successive breaks and partial breaks. In a theoretical fabric, certain threads can be entirely new, while others are taken from earlier weavings. The Copernican and Galilean revolutions also involved the preservation of a heritage" (Canguilhem cited in Gutting 1989:40). This dynamic interplay of breaks and weavings will be crucial for Foucault.

hypothetico-deductive inference from data that are themselves mediated by complex instruments" (Gutting 1989:13). Because his reflection was constrained by the particular science of his historical period, Descartes's philosophy is only able to push up against the limits marked out by a particular episteme. Likewise, Kant's "formulation of a transcendental, *a priori* analytic of principles that regulate all employments of reason collapsed with the triumph of theories (relativity and quantum mechanics) based on the denial of such Kantian principles as the permanence of substance, which require a continuity of energy inconsistent with quantization" (ibid.). In other words, "[w]hat initially seem to be *a priori* constraints on thought as such turn out to be contingent conditions derived from philosophers' inability to think beyond the framework of present science" (ibid.). Foucault describes his project vis-à-vis the Enlightenment:

> I have been seeking, on the one hand, to emphasize the extent to which a type of philosophical interrogation – one that simultaneously problematizes man's relation to the present, man's historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject – is rooted in the Enlightenment. On the other hand, I have been seeking to stress that the thread that may connect us with the Enlightenment is not faithfulness to doctrinal elements, but rather the permanent reactivation of an attitude – that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era. (Foucault 1984:42)

There is an important attempt here to situate reason within its immanent material context[7] and an implicit acknowledgement that while this may limit the scope of any specific exercise of reflective thought, any appeal to the latter as inherently able to overcome or transcend its contextual origins, ends up relying precisely on the less obvious aspects of this context to make this appeal. In a sense, developing a critical awareness of this delimitation of reason – and of all thought and practice – is the core of Foucault's entire project, which remains indebted to the

[7] In this regard, Bachelard and Canguilhem are sometimes seen as precursors to Kuhn. Gutting observes that "[f]or Bachelard, the most striking and important such breaks came with relativity and quantum theory, which he saw as initiating a "new scientific spirit." This "new spirit" involved not only radically new conceptions of nature but also new conceptions of scientific method (e.g., new criteria of explanatory adequacy). Bachelard's detailed treatments of this topic (in, e. g., *La valeur inductive de la relativité* and *Le nouvel esprit scientifique*) preceded by two or three decades similar discussions by Anglo-American historians and philosophers of science such as Kuhn and Feyerabend" (Gutting 1989:16). This, in turn, may explain why some have viewed Foucault's idea of the episteme as equivalent to Kuhn's notion of the paradigm shift; as we will see, however, there are substantial differences between the two, and they are largely incommensurable.

school of Bachelard and Canguilhem to an extent that is seldom commented on. As Gutting avers, numerous aspects of Bachelard's project can be found in Foucault, including

"the essential historicity of scientific conceptions as well as the understanding of this historicity in terms of a discontinuous series of breaks … the basic negative epistemological and metaphysical theses – for example, the rejections of a sharp theory/observation distinction and of naive realism – associated with Bachelard's account of science … [an] emphasis on the need to treat questions of scientific rationality in 'regional' terms, eschewing grandly global theories for specific studies of particular disciplinary and chronological domains … [and an] insistence that philosophical *a prioris* derive from our inability or unwillingness to think beyond the categories" that define the present (Gutting 1989:52-3). Similarly, Foucault "follows Canguilhem in emphasizing the various ways that continuities can persist across epistemological breaks" (ibid.:53-4). Recognising these precursors provides for fresh insight into the stakes of Foucault's project. When he observes that "a philosophical ethos consisting in a critique of what we are saying, thinking and doing through a historical ontology of ourselves" (Foucault 1984:45), for instance, we can understand this historical ontology of ourselves as subjects of knowledge (in both senses of this term), as precisely a generalisation and elaboration of Bachelard and Canguilhem's limning of the invisible markings that delimit the present. With this in mind, this discussion will turn to an examination of the archaeological project and its consequences for our conception of philosophy. In what follows, it will be shown how Foucault, even when he is not making explicitly *philosophical* claims, dramatically shifts the grounds – or rather the grounding, as well as assumptions about the very possibility of grounding – with which a significant amount of philosophy has traditionally operated.

1.3 Breathing the dust of the archives

Barry Allen provides a useful summary of Foucault's ideas about knowledge, as detailed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. As he observes, Foucault makes several key points:

- Knowledge should be identified with discursive practices, i.e., "system[s] for the formation of statements" (Foucault 2002b:206) or the "syntax of the knowledge of a

time" (a view that is nuanced in later work where the non-discursive, e.g., biopower, takes a more central role).

- The circulating knowledge (*connaissance*) represented in actual statements reflects a specific relation and set of rules between subjects and objects and is distinct from *savoir*. This involves the "silent play of rules that generate the phenomenal surface" that forms the grid of intelligibility that conditions connaissance or conceptual possibilities.
- Knowledge is the referent of discursive practice, as well as the position occupied by a subject in relation to an object of discourse. Foucault (2002b:201) refers to this as "[t]he field of coordination and subordination of statements in which concepts appear, and are defined, applied, and transformed" and the "possibilities of use and appropriation offered by discourse" (ibid)[8].
- The situated nature of knowledge extends to the objects of knowledge, which are, qua knowledge, *constituted* as "nodal points of intersection among relations actualized in discourse" (Allen 2010:147).
- Discourses may pass several thresholds, beginning as emergent sets of rules that are relatively enduring, and then possibly crossing a threshold of epistemologisation (in which systems of verification for the operation of these rules – an epistemology – begins to settle) and a further threshold of scientificity (at which point the said rules gain powers of authority and domination over other systems of rules, for example when psychiatry becomes a dominant practice in the 19th century).

As I have argued elsewhere (Eloff 2022), this is roughly similar to Deleuze's description of Foucault's system as a diagrammatics that seek to map particular arrangements of the discursive and non-discursive, or 'assemblages', and the power that flows through and sustains them (Deleuze 1986:34-6). One important implication of this view is that knowledge does not enjoy any kind of simple relationship with truth, but that truth claims instead emerge from and reflect arrangements of power-knowledge, enabling and amplifying certain claims and modes of verification while disabling or silencing others. For Foucault, truth is thus *produced by the exercise of power*, both as individual truth claims and as a part of the conceptual architecture of specific, historically situated modes of thought, or what he sometimes terms the 'historical *a priori*' or, in later work, 'regimes of truth'. This in turn explains why Foucault views his project as largely descriptive instead of prescriptive or normative, beyond the loosely meta-

[8] Allen notes here that the consequence of this relation between subjects and knowledge is that a "subject is a series of effects … a function of the language it speaks and the discipline of its body … an artifact of discursive formation … knowledge is an external regularity in which subjectivity is inscribed" (Allen 2010: 146).

normative claim that we should seek to countenance and extricate ourselves from the bind of our contingency, albeit in a necessarily immanent and experimental manner[9]. Canguilhem notes that for Foucault, as for himself, "[s]cience and philosophy presuppose the existence of a network or configuration of forms through which cultural productions are perceived" (Canguilhem 2006:79). For Foucault, the important question is not what causes the objects of our knowledge (including ourselves) *qua* objects, but instead how knowledge itself functions in such a way as to make said objects knowable in the first place. This is of course similar to Kant's reflection on the conditions of possibility of experience. Whereas Kant sought these conditions in a universal transcendental subjectivity, however, Foucault views this conditioning as itself just as contingent as what it conditions. As was shown in the discussion on Bachelard, Kant was operating within the ambit of his own historical *a priori* – something Foucault alludes to when he states that he is "inclined to see Enlightenment and humanism in a state of tension rather than identity" (Foucault 1984:44).

This gloss of the archaeological project will suffice for an examination of the key arguments put forth in *The Order of Things*. The latter "discusses the way in which reason has established then maintained the establishment of its Other – that which lies outside it, that against which it defines and defends itself", and views reason as "a mutating historical project" that "takes different forms at different times", and which is "temporal and grounded in our world" (May 2006:40). In the book, Foucault attempts

> to bring to light … the epistemological field, the episteme in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its

[9] This is a subtle point often missed by Habermas and other critics of Foucault, who argue, with various degrees of sophistication, that he is guilty of performative contradiction in the development of his own truth claims about the historical boundedness of knowledge; either, the claim goes, Foucault is purporting to have obtained a birds-eye 'view from nowhere' whereby he can step outside of his own episteme, which renders his argument *qua* epistemes invalid, or he is merely resigning himself to a tepid relativism. It is crucial to note, however, that the observation that we can become otherwise than we are is a simple descriptive or injunctive statement, encouraging a doing without attributing positive normative content to that doing. Arguments like these also invoke the spectre of the paradox of self-reference, e.g., the set of all sets that are not members of themselves, or Russell's famous example of the town barber who cuts the hair of all those who do not cut their own hair. Paradoxes like these are, in final reckoning, simply a limitation of certain forms of referential language and, by extension, conceptual thought (and further, forms that are situated within a specific historical *a priori*), which is perhaps why some recent philosophers have developed systems of deflationary logic or forms of non-conceptual theorization (e.g., Badiou's use of set theory as a way of thinking the unthinkable. The archaeologist is not separate from his episteme, but by digging he nonetheless is able to unearth what is buried in it. This practice is "not seeking to make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science; it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom" (Foucault 1984:46).

> growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility … those configurations within the space of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science (Foucault 2002a:xxii).

As Gutting notes, *The Order of Things* "can be regarded as a critique of the concept of man[10] carried out in three stages", first by showing "that the concept had no role at all in the Classical Age that preceded our modern period"; second, by analysing "modern philosophical efforts to develop a coherent understanding of man" and showing how they are doomed to failure; and, finally, by showing how the 19th century human sciences, while they succeeded at obtaining significant knowledge about man as a being of life, labour and language, are "themselves are based on disciplines that undermine the concept of man" (Gutting 1989:5). The bulk of the book is constituted by Foucault's exploration of the various conceptions of and relations between life, labour and language[11] in three different epistemes: the Renaissance, the Classical age and the modern age of man. The latter was inaugurated by Kant, but reached its full thresholds of positivity, epistemologisation and scientificity throughout the 19th century and into the 20th. Foucault notes that it is at this historical juncture, "[w]hen natural history becomes biology, when the analysis of wealth becomes economics, when, above all, reflection upon language becomes philology [that] man appears in his ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and as a subject that knows" (Foucault 2002a:340) – "as the being through which all knowledge is possible" (Foucault 1999:93)[12]. We see, then, the emergence of a new "historical *a priori* which has since the nineteenth century served as an almost self-evident ground for our

[10] Foucault uses the gendered term 'man' to refer to humanity. This, however, is due more to his specific conception of the modern human subject of knowledge (which he sometimes capitalises as 'Man' to make his point clear) than a perpetuation of historical referential gender biases.

[11] Foucault observes, for instance, a shift from General Grammar, the Analysis of Wealth, and Natural History in the Classical episteme to philology, economics and biology in the modern episteme; this is not a simple one-for-one transformation but instead a redistribution of relations within a relational field of knowledge, i.e., what can be said and what can be known, that also opens up a possible space of emergence for other positivities (e.g., contemporary science). As Foucault notes, "Philology, biology, and political economy were established, not in the places formerly occupied by general grammar, natural history, and the analysis of wealth, but in an area where those forms of knowledge did not exist, in the space they left blank, in the deep gaps that separated their broad theoretical segments and that were filled with the murmur of the ontological continuum" (Foucault 2002a: 225). Archaeology is also non-totalising in this regard; it "does not believe, therefore, that a system of positivity is a synchronic figure that one can perceive only by suspending the whole of the diachronic process. Far from being indifferent to succession, archaeology maps the temporal vectors of derivation" (Foucault 2002b: 186).

[12] This is not to claim that man did not exist before the modern age; however, "[t]he modern themes of an individual who lives, speaks, and works in accordance with the laws of an economics, a philology, and a biology, but who also, by a sort of internal torsion and overlapping, has acquired the right, through the interplay of those very laws, to know them and to subject them to total clarification – all these themes so familiar to us today and linked to the existence of the 'human sciences' are excluded by Classical thought: it was not possible at that time that there should arise, on the boundary of the world, the strange stature of a being whose nature (that which determines it, contains it, and has traversed it from the beginning of time) is to know nature, and itself, in consequence, as a natural being" (Foucault 2002a:338).

thought" (Foucault 2002a:375). This emergence represents a shift in modes of ordering knowledge from a regime of representation based on systems of resemblance and, later, taxonomic and tabular forms of classification, to one in which various aporias in knowledge – of both subject and object, as well as their relations – become increasingly apparent, as does an insidious circularity between the simultaneously empirical and transcendental nature of knowledge. This is something Foucault draws out in his analytic of finitude. Specifically, Foucault describes the emergence of this new episteme "that was established with the appearance of economics, biology, and philology"[13] and which reflected "the thought of finitude laid down by the Kantian critique as philosophy's task" as still forming "the immediate space of our reflection" (Foucault 2002a:419). In other words, for Foucault (writing in 1966) our ordering of knowledge remained caught up within the episteme that emerged in the early 19th century. However, Foucault also sees this episteme as drawing to a close and suggests "that something new is about to begin, something we glimpse only as a thin line of light low on the horizon" (ibid.)[14]. In fact, Foucault suggests that "Hölderlin, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx" already "felt this certainty that in them a thought and perhaps a culture were coming to a close". It was Nietzsche, however, who "indicated the turning-point from a long way off" by proposing that "it is not so much the absence or the death of God that is affirmed as the end of man (that narrow, imperceptible displacement, that recession in the form of identity, which are the reason why man's finitude has become his end" (ibid.:420). As Foucault poetically claims, Nietzsche's thought heralds not just the death of God, but also "the end of his murderer; it is the explosion of man's face in laughter, and the return of masks; it is the scattering of the profound stream of time by which he felt himself carried along and whose pressure he suspected in the very being of things; it is the identity of the Return of the Same with the absolute dispersion of man" (ibid.). Foucault continues this line of thought by suggesting that what is in fact signalled by Nietzsche, is also the end of philosophy in the traditional mode[15]. To

[13] Foucault refers to the naturalist Cuvier, the economist Ricardo and the linguist Bopp as exemplary of this emergence (Foucault 2002a:275).

[14] In fact, it is perhaps only because a certain episteme is drawing to a close and a new one is emerging that we are able to reflect on it, given that "it is not possible for us to describe our own archive, since it is from within these rules that we speak, since it is that which gives to what we can say – and to itself, the object of our discourse – its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and the archaeology of knowledge coexistence, its system of accumulation, historicity, and disappearance" (Foucault 2002b:146-7).

[15] "It is easy to see why Nietzsche's thought should have had, and still has for us, such a disturbing power when it introduced in the form of an imminent event, the Promise-Threat, the notion that man would soon be no more – but would be replaced by the superman; in a philosophy of the Return, this meant that man had long since disappeared and would continue to disappear, and that our modern thought about man, our concern for him, our humanism, were all sleeping serenely over the threatening rumble of his non-existence. Ought we not to remind ourselves – we who believe ourselves bound to a finitude which belongs only to us, and which opens up the truth

countenance "the thought of finitude and the appearance of man in the field of knowledge" (ibid.) is to recognise that one of the logic consequences of the Enlightenment project – and Kant's critical project more specifically – is its own self-overcoming. If the modern episteme still "serves as the positive ground of our knowledge, that which constituted man's particular mode of being and the possibility of knowing him empirically", it is this very pursuit of both empirical and transcendental knowledge that ungrounds the figure of man (Foucault 2002a:420-1)[16]. Foucault reiterates this view elsewhere, observing that "the thread which may connect us with the Enlightenment is not faithfulness to doctrinal elements but, rather, the permanent reactivation of an attitude – that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era" (Foucault 1984:42). As Foucault notes, accepting this self-overcoming of man, and "a general theory of discontinuity, of series, of limits, unities, specific orders, and differentiated autonomies and dependences"[17] (Foucault 2002b:13) more broadly is a particularly difficult task, given the extent to which it unsettles our established ways of conceiving of the world and our place in it, both through philosophy and other forms of human thought and action; how it decentres "the sovereignty of the subject, and the twin figures of anthropology and humanism" (ibid). It is worth quoting Foucault in full here:

> If the history of thought could remain the locus of uninterrupted continuities, if it could endlessly forge connexions that no analysis could undo without abstraction, if it could weave, around everything that men say and do, obscure synthesis that anticipate for him, prepare him, and lead him endlessly towards his future, it would provide a privileged shelter for the sovereignty of consciousness. Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject – in the form of historical consciousness – will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode. Making historical analysis

of the world to us by means of our cognition – ought we not to remind ourselves that we are bound to the back of a tiger?" (Foucault 2002a:351).

[16] Foucault specifically discusses this in terms of discourse, stating that "[m]an had been a figure occurring between two modes of language; or, rather, he was constituted only when language, having been situated within representation and, as it were, dissolved in it, freed itself from that situation at the cost of its own fragmentation: man composed his own figure in the interstices of that fragmented language" (Foucault 2002a:421)

[17] i.e., epistemes and the rupture and transformation of epistemes.

> the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action are the two sides of the same system of thought (Foucault 2002b:13).

Let us now turn to Foucault's discussion of this self-overcoming in the famous analytic of finitude in the second half of *The Order of Things*.

1.4 'Man' as a transient wrinkle in our knowledge

> *Man, in the analytic of finitude, is a strange empirico-transcendental doublet, since he is a being such that knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible.* (Foucault 2002a:347)

Foucault offers several summaries of his elaborate argument about the mutual presupposition of the transcendental and empirical in the production of knowledge of man[18], but perhaps his most succinct formulation is that "[i]t is probably impossible to give empirical contents transcendental value, or to displace them in the direction of a constituent subjectivity, without giving rise, at least silently, to an anthropology – that is, to a mode of thought in which the rightful limitations of acquired knowledge (and consequently of all empirical knowledge) are at the same time the concrete forms of existence, precisely as they are given in that same empirical knowledge" (Foucault 2002a:270). Said otherwise, for Foucault there is a vicious circle or infinite loop inherent in our attempts to ground our knowledge of ourselves as thinking beings, given that it is we as thinking beings who form the conditions of possibility for the production of knowledge. In Foucault's words, "man's mode of being as constituted in modern thought enables him to play two roles: he is at the same time at the foundation of all positivities and present, in a way that cannot even be termed privileged, in the element of empirical things" (ibid.:375). This is a problem unique to the modern age, Foucault avers, as in previous ages, for example the Classical, "there was no epistemological consciousness of man

[18] In the chapter 'Man and his Doubles', in which the elaboration of this argument takes place, Foucault assigns a pivotal role to language/discourse. A full accounting of the role this plays in the delineation of the conditions in which modern man finds himself is beyond the scope of this essay, however, and one can retain, or perhaps even better examine, the salient details of Foucault's argument without situating it within this specific frame.

as such" (ibid.:336). This does not mean, of course, that human beings did not reflect on both themselves and the conditions of possibility of knowledge, but instead simply that before the Kantian rupture, the relation between subject and object – even when that subject was the object of reflection – was conceived entirely differently. The consequences of this empirico-transcendental Gordian knot are a kind of radical finitude whereby man, an empirical, finite being, is also (following Kant's Copernican turn) the transcendental source of representations about man. For Kant the conditions under which anything can be known are limned via the transcendental deduction of the faculties; in other words, it is the transcendental subject, *qua* the unity of apperception, that is the source and arbiter of knowledge via the categories and the schemata (Kant 1996:141-163). If, following Foucault, this transcendental subject is itself located within a particular historical *a priori*, or episteme[19], then both the subject and object of reflection are historically contingent, immanent to a particular field of knowledge, and thus the transcendental conditions of knowledge rely on the real empirical nature of subjectivity[20]. As Han explains, "[t]he anthropological structure specific to modernity is thus defined from the beginning by this doubling of the transcendental subject as an object of empirical knowledge: In later Foucault's terms, the form of subjectivation particular to man is such that he cannot become a subject of knowledge without being inscribed within the horizon of his own experience, and thus without appearing to himself as an object of knowledge" (Han 2006:179). This strange ungrounding loop of the determining and the determined is the unravelling of the modern era. Our empirical knowledge relies on transcendental conditions that are themselves conditioned by the knowing subject as an empirical being (and specifically a subject that knows itself, in its life, labour and language, through the constraints imposed by the historical a priori). "[I]f man's knowledge is finite," says Foucault, "it is because he is trapped, without possibility of liberation, within the positive contents of language, labour and life" (Foucault 2002a:345). Furthermore, "each of these positive forms in which man can learn that he is finite is given to him only against the background of its own finitude" (ibid.:343). *This* is what Foucault means when he says that we are empirico-transcendental doubles, and the consequences for securing the foundations of thought in general, and philosophy specifically, are strikingly obvious. *The*

[19] Gutting helpfully suggests that this forms a 'transcendental objectivity', in contrast to Kant's transcendental subjectivity (1989:185).

[20] Gutting explains that "transcendental finitude and empirical finitude are superposed in such a way that the former, rather than being the analytic correlate of the notion of a transcendental standpoint, is now cashed out in terms of the synthetic, empirical limitations (life, language, labor) that bear causally on man" (Gutting 2010:127).

epistemic conditions under which we come to understand our finitude are themselves finite. Foucault reiterates:

> At the foundation of all the empirical positivities, and of everything that can indicate itself as a concrete limitation of man's existence, we discover a finitude – which is in a sense the same: it is marked by the spatiality of the body, the yawning of desire, and the time of language; and yet it is radically other: in this sense, the limitation is expressed not as a determination imposed upon man from outside (because he has a nature or a history), but as a fundamental finitude which rests on nothing but its own existence as fact, and opens upon the positivity of all concrete limitation (Foucault 2002a:343).

Once he has elaborated this existentially unsettling notion of the empirico-transcendental doublet, Foucault then moves to a reflection on the necessary relation between the cogito and the unthought, claiming that man is unable "to describe himself as a configuration in the episteme without thought at same time discovering, both in itself and outside itself, an element of darkness … an unthought which it contains entirely, yet in which it is also caught" (Foucault 2002a:355). We can understand this claim if we reflect on how fields like linguistics, biology and economics developed, in the modern era, concepts that were assumed to be *a priori* or transcendental to human experience, and that we could thus never have direct traction over. This would include the claims made within fields like structural linguistics about abstract systems of signifiers, as well as Freudian conceptions of the unconscious and, of course, Marx's analysis of capitalism. While these all seek to point out real features of the world, they are not features we have empirical experience of but instead those very concrete abstractions purported to define our empirical experience as such, while simultaneously being grounded in the empirical (for from where else do such things arise other than from our life, labour and language?). Foucault observes of modern man:

> How can he be that labour whose laws and demands are imposed upon him like some alien system? How can he be the subject of a language that for thousands of years has been formed without him, a language whose organization escapes him, whose meaning sleeps an almost invincible sleep in the words he momentarily activates by means of discourse, and within which he is obliged, from the very outset, to lodge his speech and

> thought, as though they were doing no more than animate, for a brief period, one segment of that web of in numerable possibilities? (Foucault 2002a:353).

There is, in other words, an unthought at the heart of thought. In fact, for Foucault, "the whole of modern thought is imbued with the necessity of thinking the unthought … of ending man's alienation by reconciling him with his own essence, of making explicit the horizon that provides experience with its background of immediate and disarmed proof, of lifting the veil of the Unconscious" (Foucault 2002a:356). This is an existential gap that we can never breach because it is we ourselves who give rise to this gap in our thought and action by virtue of us being "that paradoxical figure in which the empirical contents of knowledge necessarily release, of themselves, the conditions that have made them possible" (ibid.:351). Precisely because of this, we can neither posit ourselves "in the immediate and sovereign transparency of a cogito" nor "inhabit the objective inertia of something that, by rights, does not and never can lead to self-consciousness." (ibid.) Instead, "[m]an is a mode of being which accommodates that dimension – always open, never finally delimited, yet constantly traversed – which extends from a part of himself not reflected in a cogito to the act of thought by which he apprehends that part; and which, in the inverse direction, extends from that pure apprehension to the empirical clutter, the chaotic accumulation of contents, the weight of experiences constantly eluding themselves, the whole silent horizon of what is posited in the sandy stretches of non-thought" (ibid.). As with the empirico-transcendental doublet, the relation between the modern cogito and the unthought pose fundamental philosophical questions for us. For instance, we need to reflect on how the being of man, which is defined via this difficult relation between being, thought and their aporetic self-delimitation within the modern historical *a priori*, a form of being "which could so easily be characterised by the fact that 'it has thoughts' and is possibly alone in having them, has an ineradicable and fundamental relation to the unthought", and involves a "form of reflection … far removed from both Cartesianism and Kantian analysis, a form that involves, for the first time, man's being in that dimension where thought addresses the unthought and articulates itself upon it" (ibid.:354).

As soon as we begin to describe ourselves as "a configuration in the episteme" our thought discovers an unavoidable Otherness[21]. This unthought is, like the empirico-transcendental

[21] "In any case, the unthought has accompanied man, mutely and uninterruptedly, since the nineteenth century … it has received the complementary form and the inverted name of that for which it was the Other and the shadow:

doublet, dual edged; it is "in one sense, the shadow cast by man [*sic*] as he emerged in the field of knowledge; in another, the blind stain by which it is possible to know him" (ibid.:356). A philosophy that remains unaware of this reflexive void is simply one that has refused to accept the consequences of the inauguration of the modern episteme, seeking to ground itself in a metaphysical appeal to wholeness and essence – or objective knowledge – without noticing that the ground itself is moving. This does not entail transcendentalising a constitutive lack or void[22] as, in their various ways, philosophers like Levinas, Derrida and Badiou have done. Implicit in such a move is the exact kind of assertion of a normative ontological claim, albeit exceedingly subtle and defined in negative, that Foucault seeks to avoid throughout his work. It does, however, mean recognising the contingency of the given *qua* historical *a priori* and not tracing the transcendental from the empirical or, indeed, the dynamic interplay of marked and unmarked space that defines the empirico-transcendental doublet of man. I shall pursue this line of thinking further via Deleuze in the next chapter.

Finally, Foucault turns to a discussion of "the retreat and return of the origin" (Foucault 2002a:358-365). This is not the origin as 'ideal genesis', as was the case in the Classical age where the form of representation was applied to history and chronology but an ever-elusive origin "where man's being is always maintained, in relation to man himself, in a remoteness and a distance that constitute him" (ibid.:367). Gutting observes that there are two ways in which this pursuit of the origin has taken place within modern philosophy: either as the restoration of a plenitude that has been lost (Hegel and, arguably, Marx), or (as with Heidegger) the "opening of a void, a collapse of all the meanings of our history back into the nothingness from which they sprang" (Gutting 1989:206). These two approaches both view the return to the origin, whether in positive or negative, as "a return to the authentic and original meaning of human existence." (ibid.) In the modern episteme, then, man seeks his origin in that which precedes him – labour, life and language – but this is also that which simultaneously emerges

in Hegelian phenomenology, it was the An sich as opposed to the Für sich; for Schopenhauer it was the Unbewusste; for Marx it was alienated man; in Husserl's analyses it was the implicit, the inactual, the sedimented, the non-effected" (Foucault 2002a:356).

[22] Foucault traces the roots of this move to the 19th century, noting how the Other/unthought has been described in various tacitly transcendental ways. For "Hegelian phenomenology, it was the An sich as opposed to the Für sich; for Schopenhauer it was the Unbewusste; for Marx it was alienated man; in Husserl's analyses it was the implicit, the inactual, the sedimented, the non-effected – in every case, the inexhaustible double that presents itself to reflection as the blurred projection of what man is in his truth, but that also plays the role of a preliminary ground upon which man must collect himself and recall himself in order to attain his truth" (Foucault 2002a:356). This results in various philosophical attempts at reconciliation, exemplified by dialectics, whereby "modern thought is advancing towards that region where man's Other must become the Same as himself" (ibid.:358).

from and exceeds man. It is an origin "sought for in that fold where man in all simplicity applies his labour to a world that has been worked for thousands of years, lives in the freshness of his unique, recent, and precarious existence a life that has its roots in the first organic formations, and composes into sentences which have never before been spoken (even though generation after generation has repeated them) words that are older than all memory", and which binds man "to multiple, intersecting, often mutually irreducible chronologies, scatters him through time and pinions him at the centre of the duration of things" (Foucault 2002a:361). Foucault's argument here is quite subtle: what he is saying is that while modern man tries to ground himself in a notion of origin whereby the "unity of time would be restored and that man's origin would be no more than a date, a fold, in the sequential series of beings (placing that origin, and with it the appearance of culture, the dawn of civilizations, within the stream of biological evolution) … his individual or cultural time makes it possible, in a psychological or historical genesis, to define the moment at which things meet the face of their truth for the first time" (Foucault 2002a:363).

In other words, because man necessarily traces his origin through the very same empirical, historically contingent features that define the scope of the visible and sayable – e.g., life, labour and language – and that both transcend him (they began long before our births as individual human beings) and are entirely empirically situated. Simply put, because man's experience "is wholly constituted and limited by things" that precede him, and thus which he can only ever know partially – or empirico-transcendentally, i.e., in a necessarily finite manner as they are both the grounds and the grounding – "no one can ever assign him an origin" (ibid.:361). As Han explains, "[t]he subject cannot recapture the moment of its emergence as a thinking subject without retrojecting it into the paradoxical past of the originary", which means that man cannot account "for the conditions of [his] own genesis" (Han 2006:181). Foucault says of modern man,

> when he tries to define himself as a living being, he can uncover his own beginning only against the background of a life which itself began long before him; when he attempts to re-apprehend himself as a labouring being, he cannot bring even the most rudimentary forms of such a being to light except within a human time and space which have been previously institutionalized, and previously subjugated by society; and when he attempts to define his essence as a speaking subject, prior to any effectively

> constituted language, all he ever finds is the previously unfolded possibility of language, and not the stumbling sound, the first word upon the basis of which all languages and even language itself became possible. It is always against a background of the already begun that man is able to reflect on what may serve for him as origin. For man, then, origin is by no means the beginning – a sort of dawn of history from which his ulterior acquisitions would have accumulated (Foucault 2002a:359-60).

In sum, then, the man of the analytic of finitude is a strange empirico-transcendental doublet, caught in a series of infinite loops[23] whereby he is both the subject and object of knowledge – its conditions and its conditioned – while pursuing this knowledge in the shadow of the unthought that is the necessary double of thought, as a being who both seeks an origin and is denied this origin by virtue of his own double origination within it as a contingent being caught within greater contingencies that define his own contingency[24]. Or, as Foucault says, it is in the mode of being of "the connection of the positivities with finitude, the reduplication of the empirical and the transcendental, the perpetual relation of the cogito to the unthought, the retreat and return of the origin, define for us man's mode of being. It is in the analysis of that mode of being … that reflection since the nineteenth century has sought a philosophical foundation for the possibility of knowledge" (Foucault 2002a:365). In short, in Foucault's formulation, the analytic of finitude seeks to demonstrate that man is determined precisely by his own being in its radical limitations (ibid.:370). While the dawn of the modern episteme held out the hope that empirical knowledge of man could "serve as a possible philosophical field in which the foundation of knowledge, the definition of its limits, and, in the end, the truth of all truth must be discoverable" (ibid.:372), this ends up being a naïve sleep of critical reason that is slowly eroded by its own conclusions, thus, by the analytic of finitude that necessarily results from the unfolding of a thought of this nature. In order to fully awaken philosophy from this sleep, we need to "destroy the anthropological 'quadrilateral'[25] in its very foundations" (ibid.);

[23] "[A] finitude without infinity is no doubt a finitude that has never finished, that is always in recession with relation to itself, that always has something still to think at the very moment when it thinks, that always has time to think again what it has thought" (Foucault 2002a:406).

[24] In *The Order of Things*, the analytic of finitude is ambiguously described both as forming one of four conditions (along with the empirico-transcendental doublet, interplay of the cogito and unthought and the retreat and return of the origin) as well as a more general condition which the latter three form various aspects of. Gutting seems to prefer the second reading (Gutting 1989:200), whereas others among the few sustained interlocutions of the early work (e.g., Han 2002) appear to prefer the first.

[25] This is Foucault's term for the various aspects of the analytic of finitude we have discussed. Beyond being a reference to the modern idea of man, the term 'anthropology' is also an allusion to Kant's 'Anthropology from a

this destruction, the death of man augured by Nietzsche, represents "the return of the beginning of philosophy" (ibid.). Foucault provocatively declares,

> To all those who still wish to talk about man, about his reign or his liberation, to all those who still ask themselves questions about what man is in his essence, to all those who wish to take him as their starting-point in their attempts to reach the truth, to all those who, on the other hand, refer all knowledge back to the truths of man himself, to all those who refuse to formalize without anthropologizing, who refuse to mythologize without demystifying, who refuse to think without immediately thinking that it is man who is thinking, to all these warped and twisted forms of reflection we can answer only with a philosophical laugh – which means, to a certain extent, a silent one (Foucault 2002a:373).

The form of philosophy that emerges from Foucault's reflection upon the limits of the modern episteme and its self-overcoming is inherently transgressive[26], moving from the Kantian question "of knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing" to an interrogation of "what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory" to see "what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints" (Foucault 1984:45). We can, through this, become other than we already are and begin to limn, experimentally and without either a dogmatic metaphysics or the kind of disingenuous 'anti-metaphysics' of the modern episteme that ended up being simply a disavowed metaphysics of finitude, a future that is different from the present that is passing. All this takes place within the interplay of determination and contingency, continuity and rupture, that defines the movement of epistemes, of relations between power and knowledge and the subjectivations that result from these, across time and thought. Fifty-six years ago, Foucault saw that the face of man drawn in the sand was already being washed away. From the vantage point of 2022, while its faint outlines are perhaps still visible, it is increasingly clear that the tide has washed in. This new

Pragmatic Point of View', which Foucault translated and critically engaged with in his 'Introduction to Kant's Anthropology' (Foucault 2008).

[26] Han, with reference to Foucault's later 'ethical' work, which is often seen as starkly different to that of the archaeological period, observes how said later work, premised upon the 'care of the self', in fact delineates a corollary positive project wherein the analytic of finitude is opposed "by a renaissance of the neo-Platonic virtuous circle. In contrast with Man, an ambiguous but fixed structure, the spiritual subject is engaged in a perpetual self-transfiguration through which the more he is transformed by his knowledge, the more he becomes suited to know. However, this renaissance presupposes the abandonment of the impossible demand for an absolute foundation for philosophical knowledge as well as of the scientific model of truth" (Han 2006:201).

episteme, which has already received numerous names (the Anthropocene, the Algocene and the Necrocene, to gesture towards just one cluster of tentative appellations), its threshold of positivity having been reached even as its further thresholds still perhaps elude us, constrains and enables us in different and unprecedented ways. Its modes of subjectivation and objectivation remain to be fully interrogated[27], a task that will only become fully possible when it too has begun to drift away from itself. In the interim, it is up to us to draw the necessary consequences for both philosophical practice and life, and to develop a "critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings" (Foucault 1984:47).

2. The thought of individuation is the individuation of thought

2.1 Introduction

> *I believe in philosophy as a system ... [but] for me, the system must not only be in perpetual heterogeneity, it must be a heterogenesis, something which, it seems to me, has never before been attempted.* (Deleuze 2010:vii)

In the previous chapter, I indicated how Foucault, via the analytic of finitude, draws critical attention to the contingency of the ways in which we produce knowledge, as well as the complex, ever-shifting relations between knowledge and power, and the implications that this has for how we conceive of philosophy. In one sense, we can think of Deleuze's engagement with the question of the production of knowledge as a development of Foucault's observation towards the end of *The Order of Things* that the figure of Man is reaching its end and that a new figure, or episteme, is in the process of replacing it. If the analytic of finitude comprehensively dismantles the relationships between thought, knowledge and truth that we have historically taken for granted as perennial, or radically subverts their claim to sufficiency by demonstrating the boundedness and circularity of their epistemological grounds, Deleuze (most substantially in *Difference and Repetition* (2004) and the later *What is Philosophy?*

[27] We can perhaps see some cursory gestures in this direction in the new materialisms, posthumanism, speculative realism and object-oriented ontology, all of them premised upon a radical decentering of the figure of man.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1994)) develops in response to this an entirely new approach to thinking about what it means to do philosophy. Deleuze's view of what thought in general – and philosophy specifically – entail, is profoundly at odds with our common-sense ways of understanding what we're doing when we derive a new thought or employ reason to delineate and substantiate an instance of knowledge, and because of this it can occasionally be difficult to see how his work can be meaningfully employed within a philosophical or meta-philosophical context. Indeed, Deleuze usually describes thought more in terms of an approach to learning and experimentation that involves a mutual becoming of the learner and the learned than as the reflective activity of a unified conscious subject of the Platonic, Cartesian or Kantian varieties. When he discusses activities such as "[l]earning to swim or learning a foreign language", for instance, he describes this not as a passive pursuit of the cogito but as the composition of "the singular points of one's own body or one's own language with those of another shape or element, which tears us apart but also propels us into a hitherto unknown and unheard-of world of problems". He describes these problems, which are in turn often described in a highly technical register as mathematical continuous multiplicities[28] or distributions of singular and ordinary points in topological manifolds, as demanding "the very transformation of our body and our language" (Deleuze 2004:252).

This focus on transformation and *doing* is a key aspect of the philosophy of difference and heterogenesis (i.e., difference as the genetic dynamism that gives rise to thought and being) that Deleuze and Guattari[29] are best-known for, and which is variously described as becoming, ontogenesis[30] or individuation. Grappling with these roughly synonymous terms is crucial for a coherent account of Deleuze's philosophy, and here the influence of Gilbert Simondon, a philosopher of science and technology who, like Foucault, extended the work of Bachelard and Canguilhem, is central. For my current purpose, the most important aspect of Simondon's philosophy vis-à-vis Deleuze – albeit one of the most difficult to fully understand, given how

[28] Deleuze opens his late essay 'The Actual and the Virtual', commonly regarded as his final piece of writing, by asserting quite plainly that "[p]hilosophy is the theory of multiplicities" (Deleuze and Parnet 2010:148).

[29] The relations between Deleuze and Guattari, who produced numerous books both together and individually, is exceedingly complex, especially given their provocative critique of authorship in A Thousand Plateaus (1987: 3) and Deleuze's penchant for indirect free discourse, i.e., for speaking as – or on behalf of – those he writes about. For ease of writing, I will refer solely to Deleuze in this section, although Guattari's name should be assumed to be implicitly cited whenever I refer to their project in general.

[30] The term 'ontogenesis' is taken from the philosopher of science Raymond Ruyer. A discussion of Ruyer's specific use of this concept is beyond the scope of our current aims, although it should be noted that he is also responsible for the idea of absolute survey employed extensively in Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy*?

counterintuitive it is – is that *the thought of individuation is the individuation of thought*. I will unpack this profound idea in more detail below, but for now it will suffice to note that what Simondon is claiming is that a consistently immanent and materialist account of thought, and of ontology more generally, entails first that thought comes to be in the same way as anything else comes to be, and that *coming to be*, or individuation, is necessarily prior to being or the individuated. In other words, as Simondon makes clear throughout *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information* (2020), we need to look beyond the everyday world of fully formed subjects and objects, while remaining wholly within immanence, in order to account for what gives rise to this everyday world in the first place, otherwise we are, to invoke Deleuze's critique of Kant, tracing "the so-called transcendental structures from the empirical acts of a psychological consciousness"[31] (Deleuze 2004:179). In other words, we are assuming that the conditions of possibility of experience – and of the world – resemble experience and the world or, more simply put, we are subordinating "difference to identity in order to think it" (ibid.:xii).

This fundamental insight is what gives rise to what Deleuze will describe as transcendental empiricism (ibid.:71), a philosophical approach that assumes absolute immanence, and that aims not to trace the conditions of possible experience from the actual, as Kant does in his first critique, but instead to diagram the conditions of real experience. This approach provides an account of ontogenesis or becoming that does not assume the prior existence of the established but instead, through a process that Deleuze will describe as vice-diction, is able to grasp the established as emerging from a pre-individual field of self-differing difference. A full description of this field, which is variously termed the *virtual* and the *plane of immanence*, occupies most of the second half of *Difference and Repetition*. Here I will have to make do with a highly condensed and provisional account of the complex dynamic interplay of ontogenesis and ontology Deleuze inherits and develops from Simondon. For my current purposes, I will focus on those aspects of this interplay that are relevant to thought specifically, although it is vital to underscore that thought enjoys no special status in a Deleuzian/Simondonian materialist philosophy of becoming.

[31] Eric Alliez provides a useful explanation of Deleuze's argument, clarifying that "Kant does not do what he says and does not say what he does, inasmuch as he limits himself to tracing the transcendental from the features of the empirical, thereby failing to produce a veritable genesis that would move beyond the plan of representation – a plan that is the condition of (possible) experience of an already individuated real and that can only conceive of the diverse as imprisoned in the *a priori* unity of the subject and object" (Alliez 2004:96).

The first task, then, will be to describe this philosophy of becoming, clarifying the idea that the thought of individuation is the individuation of thought through a bringing-together of Simondon and Deleuze. Once I have sketched an outline, I will move on to examine how the assumptions of the ontogenetic account provide the basis for Deleuze's critique of the so-called 'dogmatic image of thought' in the third chapter of *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 2004:171-222). I will closely examine this, critique as it has serious implications for philosophy and alludes towards an entirely different conception of how *conception* – a term for the creation of concepts that is in fact profoundly apposite when discussing Deleuze's philosophy given its association with birth or ontogenesis – in fact operates. Once I have grappled with the dogmatic image of thought, I will move to a short discussion of Deleuze's final book, *What is Philosophy?*, in which he returns to the problems he first elaborated in *Difference and Repetition* and reiterates them in the context of providing a final account of what a philosophical practice shorn of the dogmatic image could be, while delivering a stinging critique of so-called 'court philosophers' who merely reproduce the forms of capital and the state, and the established more generally, in their practice. First, I will unpack the idea of ontogenesis in more detail.

2.2 The ontogenesis of thought and being in Simondon and Deleuze

> *[T]o live is to perpetuate an ongoing relative birth.* (Simondon 2020:325)

> *We propose to think difference in itself independently of the forms of representation which reduce it to the Same, and the relation of different to different independently of those forms which make them pass through the negative.* (Deleuze 2004:xv-i)

Simondon and Deleuze's largely overlapping philosophies of becoming[32] can perhaps be best encapsulated by Deleuze's observation in *Difference and Repetition* that "[d]ifference is not diversity" (Deleuze 2004:293). He further points out that "[d]iversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse" (ibid.). At first glance, this is a rather cryptic statement, but it forms the heart of Deleuze's philosophy of

[32] There are important differences between their accounts; these are not, however, relevant to the current discussion.

difference. Simply put, Deleuze's argument is that if we assume that the variety of what is presented to us in experience is a full reflection of what *is*, and that what gives rise to that presentation and that experience resembles the given, then we are illegitimately tracing conditions from the conditioned, like Kant did. More generally, if we operate from the premise that identity is ontologically primary, we are unable to coherently conceive of how identity comes to be and are thus, by extension, unable to think the new *qua* new, but instead remain trapped in representation[33]. We are surrounded by the diverse identities that comprise the everyday world, from words to atoms to caterpillars to scientific theories to air pollution, and tend to think in terms of these identities.

When it comes to thinking about how this diversity comes to be, however, we need to look beyond what is given towards an ontogenetic principle that is (lest we slip into circularity and tautology) necessarily without identity. Difference should therefore be understood not as difference between established terms, which would simply reproduce the primacy of identity, but as self-differing, a pre-individual inequality that forms "the noumenon closest to the phenomenon" and serves as the sufficient reason for the phenomenal world (Deleuze 2004:293). As Deleuze says, "[e]verything which happens and everything which appears is correlated with orders of differences: differences of level, temperature, pressure, tension, potential, difference of intensity" (ibid.). This resonates strongly with Simondon's earlier work on ontogenesis. Simondon is critical of two historically dominant approaches to thinking about the reality of individual being: the substantialist path and the hylomorphic path (Simondon 2020:1). In the former, individual beings are considered as founded upon themselves as opposed to being engendered in some or other manner, whereas the latter sees "the individual as generated by the encounter of a form and a [passive] matter" (ibid.). Simondon views both these approaches as operating with illicitly transcendent and idealist assumptions, and argues that any schema such as these necessarily "improperly replaces the knowledge of the genesis of a real" and "prevents the knowledge of ontogenesis" (ibid.:351), because it forces us "to revisit the conditions of the individual's existence starting from the constituted and given individual" (ibid.:1). Furthermore, such approaches assume "that the individual qua constituted

[33] We will explore Deleuze's critique of representation in more detail below. In short, however, Deleuze will argue that we add nothing to reality when we think about possibility in terms of the real, i.e., in ways that resemble the real. He observes that "it is difficult to understand what existence adds to the concept when all it does is double like with like. Such is the defect of the possible: a defect in which serves to condemn it as produced after the fact, as retroactively fabricated in the image of what resembles it" (Deleuze 2004:275-6).

individual is … the reality to be explained" (ibid.). Starting from the individuated confers automatic "ontological privilege to the constituted individual", and thus "runs the risk of not actualizing a veritable ontogenesis that would put the individual back into the system of reality within which individuation takes place" (ibid.). Simondon also observes:

> The search for the principle of individuation is finished either after individuation or before individuation, depending on whether the model of the individual is physical (for substantialistic atomism) or technological (for the hylomorphic schema). But in both cases, there is a dark zone that conceals the operation of individuation (Simondon 2020:2).

In other words, what gives rise to individuals is occluded by an account that begins from the individual, which is why we need to "try to grasp ontogenesis in the whole unfolding of its reality and to know the individual through individuation rather than individuation starting from the individual." (ibid.) According to this view, because individuals are the result of individuation, "[t]he individual would then be grasped as a relative reality, a certain phase of being which supposes a pre-individual reality prior to it and which, even after individuation, does not fully exist all by itself, for individuation does not exhaust in a single stroke the potentials of pre-individual reality" (ibid.). Therefore, "[t]he individual is therefore relative in two senses: because it is not the entire being, and because it results from a state of the being in which it neither existed as individual nor as principle of individuation" (ibid.). Developing this argument, Simondon presents a conception of being as metastable[34] – the provisional result of an individuation or 'phasing' from a pre-individual or 'pre-phased' field of potential[35] that remains immanent to any specific phase of being. This pre-individual field individuates via what Simondon terms 'transduction', which is "a physical, biological, mental, social operation through which an activity propagates gradually within a domain, by founding this propagation on a structuration of the domain that is realized from one place to the next" (ibid.:13).

[34] The term *metastability* comes from physics and chemistry, and denotes a system that can occupy multiple equilibrium states.

[35] Importantly, we should not understand this field as either unity or diversity, i.e., as either one or many, but as multiple-as-such. "As pre-individual, being is more than one – metastable, superposed, simultaneous with itself. As individuated, it is still multiple, because it is 'multiphased', "a phase of becoming that will lead to new processes."" (Simondon cited in Deleuze 2003:89). Assuming the One-ness of the virtual or the pre-phased is a major source of error in critical readings of Deleuze (e.g., Badiou's *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* (1999)); such readings, tellingly, tend to elide the influence of Simondon.

Simondon discusses crystallisation, where a supersaturated solution progressively crystallises based on the resolution of gradients around a seed crystal, as the prototypical form of transduction. It is crucial to recognise that in this view, individuation does not exhaust itself in the production of a fully individuated being. Instead, "becoming is a dimension of the being and corresponds to the being's capacity to phaseshift with respect to itself, to resolve itself by phase-shifting … becoming is not a framework in which the being exists; it is the being's dimension, the mode of resolution of an incompatibility that is rich in potentials" (ibid.:4). As was shown with the crystallisation example, this ongoing becoming is a reciprocal becoming of both "the individual and milieu", which together represent "a resolution of the initial tensions and a conservation of these tensions as a structure" (ibid.). For Simondon, this results in the replacement of ontology with ontogenesis, which in turn necessitates that we "consider being not as substance or matter or form, but as a tense, supersaturated system above the level of unity, as not merely consisting in itself, and as unable to be thought adequately by means of the principle of the excluded middle; the concrete being or complete being" (ibid.). In short, the individual is merely one phase of being.

The pre-individual field and ontogenesis via transduction are roughly equivalent to the ideas of the virtual, or plane of immanence, and individuation via different/ciation in Deleuze's ontological/ontogenetic account in *Difference and Repetition*. Protevi describes the latter in Nietzschean terms as "a world of will to power and eternal return, the being of becoming" wherein we can view the "transcendental-empirical relation as the actualizing of virtual Ideas" (Protevi 2006:1). For Deleuze, who employs a distinctly mathematical register in his description of the virtual, Ideas are precisely pre-individual "structures of differential relations, elements, and singular points" (ibid.). Instead of tracing individuation and the pre-individual field from the individual, which would result in "a possible that resembles the real, the actual creates itself in differenciating itself from the differentiated virtual field in a process of individuation of intensities" (ibid.).[36] It is interesting that Deleuze uses the term *Idea* to describe these pre-individuated distributions of difference[37]. In one sense, he is providing an alternative to

[36] What Deleuze describes as intensities, are similar to the differences in potential that are provisionally resolved in individuation for Simondon, something the latter describes as a 'disparation' (i.e, disparity) that gives rise to information (and here we should think about information not in a cybernetic sense but literally as in-formation).
[37] Specifically, "[a]n Idea is an n-dimensional, continuous, defined multiplicity. Colour – or rather, the Idea of colour – is a three-dimensional multiplicity" (Deleuze 2004:240). See following footnote for an elaboration of the idea of multiplicity in Deleuze.

Platonic Ideas, which are the quintessential example of tracing the individuating from the individuated – an alternative that does not surreptitiously transcendentalise the actual. In another sense, he is offering a deeply materialist[38] and immanent account that makes use of the resources of contemporary mathematics and complex systems theory. This is evident, for instance, when he explains that an idea "is neither one nor multiple, but a multiplicity constituted of differential elements, differential relations between those elements, and singularities corresponding to those relations." (Deleuze 2004: 364) There is also, however, an allusion towards the everyday sense of the term *idea*, such as 'having an idea'. This allusion gains traction throughout *Difference and Repetition* as Deleuze develops the notion of Ideas as objective problematic fields[39] that are not exhausted in their solutions and retain a pre-individual charge. Problematic fields, or simply problems, are in this account "the differential elements in thought, the genetic elements in the true" (ibid.:210), and, while a problem "does not exist, apart from its solutions", it is also the case that "it insists and persists in these solutions" (ibid.:212). More subtly, "[a] problem is determined at the same time as it is solved, but its determination is not the same as its solution: the two elements differ in kind, the determination amounting to the genesis of the concomitant solution" (ibid.).

In other words, a problem is not metaphysically prior to a solution in some kind of strictly transcendent sense, but instead simultaneously "both transcendent and immanent in relation to its solutions": the former "because it consists in a system of ideal liaisons or differential relations between genetic elements" and the latter "because these liaisons or relations are incarnated in the actual relations which do not resemble them and are defined by the field of solution" (ibid.).[40] More strictly, "a problem has three aspects: its difference in kind from

[38] It is a strange materialism, to be sure, stranger even than the so-called 'new materialisms'. When we understand Deleuze as a philosopher of absolute immanence, however, we can see how "the speculative radicality of his ontology determines … the possibility of a finally revolutionary philosophical materialism. An Ideal-materialism of the pure event, indefinitely multiple and singularly universal" (Alliez 2004:87).

[39] Deleuze employs the work of the mathematician-philosopher Albert Lautman in his development of the idea of the problematic field, along with notions from differential calculus, topology and a number of other disciplines, and will also refer to this field as comprised of continuous multiplicities, as opposed to the discontinuous multiplicities that populate the actual. The idea of multiplicity, which roughly refers to a non-totalising collection of heterogeneous components, is, as Manuel DeLanda has argued (DeLanda 2002:1), perhaps Deleuze's most perennial concept, appearing throughout his oeuvre in various virtual and actual forms (or, indeed, phases) as, for example, the Body without Organs, assemblages and abstract machines. Reading Deleuze and Guattari through the lens of multiplicity is a richly rewarding approach to their occasionally wildly opaque project.

[40] Or, as Deleuze alternatively describes it, "if the specification of the points already shows the necessary immanence of the problem in the solution, its involvement in the solution which covers it, along with the existence and the distribution of points, testifies to the transcendence of the problem and its directive role in relation to the organisation of the solutions themselves" (Deleuze 2004:234).

solutions; its transcendence in relation to the solutions that it engenders on the basis of its own determinant conditions; and its immanence in the solutions which cover it, the problem being the better resolved the more it is determined" (ibid.:236).

This is, of course, quite far removed from our everyday understanding of the term *transcendent*, and it is clear within the broader context of *Difference and Repetition* that Deleuze uses the term in a playful way that in fact entirely reduces it to immanence, albeit an immanence that has both a virtual/pre-individual and an actual/individuated aspect in complex reciprocal interplay. What is important, however, is Deleuze's observation that problems are the better resolved the more they are determined. But what does it mean to *determine* a problem in this way? Deleuze again turns to mathematics here, and specifically to the mathematician Abel, who "elaborated a whole method according to which solvability must follow from the form of the problem" (ibid.:237). Abel, Deleuze says, argued that "[i]nstead of seeking to find out by trial and error whether a given equation is solvable in general, we must determine the conditions of the problem which progressively specify the fields of solvability in such a way that 'the statement contains the seeds of the solution' " (ibid.).

We can see how Deleuze makes use of this idea in a more general context when he discusses social organisation, and observes that "the solution is always that which a society deserves or gives rise to as a consequence of the manner in which, given its real relations, it is able to pose the problems set within it and to it by the differential relations it incarnates" (ibid.:245). In other words, the stakes could not be higher – we will always get the solutions we deserve based on how we pose problems, or how we understand (through an experimental process of individuation or becoming) the problematic fields that double our being while inhering in it as its excess[41]. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze argues that "[a] concept always has the truth that falls to it as a function of the conditions of its creation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:27). If we move to considering thought specifically[42], as with any other aspect of being, as functioning in this way – thus, as the provisional resolution or phasing of a problematic field that persists

[41] "[I]t is correct to represent a double series of events which develop on two planes, echoing without resembling each other: real events on the level of the engendered solutions, and ideal events embedded in the conditions of the problem, like the acts – or, rather, the dreams – of the gods who double our history" (Deleuze 2004:248).
[42] It is crucial to note that Deleuze, a Spinozist who repeatedly emphasises the univocity of difference, does not operate with an even vaguely anthropomorphic conception of problems/ideas. As he bluntly states, "[p]roblems do not exist only in our heads but occur here and there in the production of an actual historical world" (Deleuze 2004:250).

within its 'solutions' – we can, albeit partly figuratively at first, begin to get some sense of what it means to think about philosophy as an ongoing grappling with the problems of thought. When we think, philosophically or otherwise, we are creating provisional solutions to virtual problems through an ontogenesis of thought. Furthermore, if we are to think about thought itself, as is the proclivity of philosophers, then – given that the pre-individual or virtual field is pre-ontological, and gives rise to being as well as thought – it follows that we cannot conceive of it in the same manner in which we would established forms of being and thought, at least not without falling prey to the now-familiar trap of tracing the transcendental from the empirical. Instead, "the questions involved in contemplation are developed in the form of active problematic fields" (Deleuze 2004:103), and this has repercussions for the kinds of questions philosophy can meaningfully pose, as well as how it poses them:

> Once it is a question of determining the problem or the Idea as such, once it is a question of setting the dialectic in motion, the question "What is X?" gives way to other questions, otherwise powerful and efficacious, otherwise imperative: "How much, how and in what cases?" (Deleuze 2004:247).[43]

In this regard, "the principle of the excluded middle and the principle of identity are no longer applicable; these principles only apply to the already individuated being, and they define an impoverished being that is separated into milieu and individual", and we cannot therefore use "classical logic … to think individuation" (Simondon 2020:13). Instead, we need to develop a thought of individuation that is itself an individuation of thought. We need to think ontogenesis in a way that is itself a genesis. More specifically, if "the individual can only be contemporaneous with its individuation, and individuation, contemporaneous with the principle", then "the principle must be truly genetic, and not simply a principle of reflection" (Deleuze 2003:86). This is because the differential elements that comprise problems are "the play of difference as such, which can neither be mediated by representation nor subordinated to the identity of the concept" (Deleuze 2004:235).

If we assimilate problems to the hypotheses of a reflective subject, for instance, then this "is already a betrayal of the problem or Idea, involving the illegitimate reduction of the latter to

[43] Deleuze is using the term 'dialectic' in a broadly Platonic sense here, not in a specifically Hegelian sense.

propositions of consciousness and to representations of knowledge" (ibid.:258). In this view, "ontogenesis would become the starting point for philosophical thought; it would really be first philosophy, anterior to the theory of knowledge and to an ontology that would follow this theory" (Simondon 2020:319). Said otherwise, because ontogenesis is "anterior to objective knowledge, which is a relation of the individuated being to the milieu after individuation", we need to think about it in ways that "precede the theory of knowledge" (ibid.). This is a difficult task indeed, especially as "it is impossible for the human subject to witness its own genesis, for the subject must exist in order for it to think" (ibid.). What is required is a thought that is itself transductive, "an epistemology that would be anterior to any logic" (ibid.:87), precisely because "the conditions of possibility of knowledge are in fact [the same as] the individuated being's causes of existence" (ibid.:293). In case this remains unclear, consider Simondon's reflections on the limits of logic within an ontogenetic account. He explains that

> nothing proves in advance that being is individuated in a single possible way; if several types of individuation existed, several logics would also have to exist, each corresponding to a definite type of individuation. The classification of ontogeneses would make it possible to pluralize logic with a valid foundation of plurality (ibid.:17).

Moving to philosophy specifically, the implications should be becoming clearer. If individual beings are the result of the ontogenetic unfolding of a pre-individual field, and if (as a provisional stabilisation of a metastability) they necessarily retain an element of this pre-individual charge, then the individual is "the result but also the milieu of individuation … a phase of becoming that will lead to new operations" (ibid.:361). More to the point, "[t]he individual is not a being but an act [that] stores, transforms, reactualizes, and carries out the schema that has constituted it; it propagates the schema by individuating" (ibid.:208). Thought, whether we regard it as specifically philosophical or not, functions as part of this propagation; philosophy, in other words, is less a kind of taxonomic juggling of terms and extant conceptual frameworks than a practice of ongoing individuation and an apprehension and redistribution of the pre-individual field itself. Deleuze describes this practice as vice-diction, and neatly summarises it as follows:

> The problem of thought is tied not to essences but to the evaluation of what is important and what is not, to the distribution of singular and regular, distinctive and

> ordinary points, which takes place entirely within the inessential or within the description of a multiplicity, in relation to the ideal events which constitute the conditions of a "problem". To have an Idea means no more than this, and erroneousness or stupidity is defined above all by its perpetual confusion with regard to the important and the unimportant, the ordinary and the singular (Deleuze 2004:249).[44]

We could thus view vice-diction as similar to learning, in that it "evolves entirely in the comprehension of problems as such, in the apprehension and condensation of singularities and in the composition of ideal events and bodies" (ibid.:251). We can think of everyday examples such as learning to swim or learning a foreign language, and how these activities involve this kind of vice-dictive practice that seeks to determine the conditions of problems through a conjugation of singular and ordinary points – thus, by determining the distributions of difference for an ontogenesis – and individuate provisional solutions to them. I will return once more to this project of learning at the end, when I discuss the dice throw and being worthy of the event. For now, I will reiterate that a philosophical thought is, on final analysis, nothing more than "a partial and relative resolution that manifests in a system which contains potentials and includes a certain incompatibility with respect to itself" (Simondon 2020:3-4). I will now turn to Deleuze's discussion of the dogmatic image of thought, which provides his most comprehensive account of the consequences of forgoing the practice of vice-diction and eliding ontogenesis in favour of ontology.

2.3 Beyond the dogmatic image of thought

> *[I]t seemed to me that the powers of difference and repetition could be reached only by putting into question the traditional image of thought. By this I mean not only that we think according to a given method, but also that there is a more or less implicit, tacit or presupposed image of thought which determines our goals and our methods when we try to think.* (Deleuze 2004:xiv)

[44] Deleuze provides a much more technical description at this point, defining vice-diction as, in the first place, the "specification of adjunct fields and, in the second, the condensation of singularities" (Deleuze 2004:249), which we can think of as broadly analogous to the thought of individuation being the individuation of thought, i.e., we are specifying the salient conditions for an event and then allowing for that event or individuation to take place. The experimental character of this practice of thought cannot be overstated.

Before I proceed, it may be useful to ground Deleuze's critique of the dogmatic image, which marks the centre point of *Difference and Repetition*, in a brief reminder of the broader project undertaken in the book. It is an impossible task to summarise a book as philosophically densely argued and wide-ranging as this[45], but roughly its aim is "to think difference in itself, and the relation of the different with the different, independent of the forms of representation that lead it back to the Same" (Deleuze 2004:xv-i). This is in turn motivated by a desire to think the new, something that is not possible if we rely on representation or identity. Instead, we should see difference "as primary and resistant to representation and to identification … [as] dissimilar in itself and hence impossible to represent" (Williams 2013:50). Furthermore, we should, as discussed earlier, view difference as *generative* – as an objectively ontogenetic principle.

Deleuze begins the book by observing that philosophy – from Plato to Hegel – has confused "the concept of difference with a merely conceptual difference, in remaining content to inscribe difference in the concept in general" (Deleuze 2004:32). According to this view, we can only understand difference as already mediated by representation: something which, for Deleuze, takes both a finite and an infinite form. Finite representation, which can be traced from Aristotle, is exemplified by models like the famous tree of Porphyry that seek to partition concepts and hierarchise identities. This asserts various ontological distributions that Deleuze argues are based on problematic assumptions about the foundations of 'good sense' and 'common sense' (terms that will be explored below). Hegel and Leibniz, Deleuze claims, attempt to move beyond this problem through infinite representation – the infinitely large of speculative reason and dialectical unfolding in the former and the infinitely small of the monads and an infinite number of properties in the latter. However, although they move us from a merely 'organic' representation to an 'orgiastic'[46] one, both thinkers remain trapped within representation in their different ways, relying on what Deleuze describes as the 'fourfold root of representation' that consists of identity along with various forms of analogy, resemblance

[45] This is probably why the secondary literature that attempts to introduce readers to *Difference and Repetition* (e.g., DeLanda 2002, Williams 2004, Hughes 2009, Somers-Hall 2013), while invaluable, tends to focus in on a single strand of the rich tapestry of argumentation, resulting in necessarily reductive accounts of the philosophical framework put forward in the book. The enormous influence of Simondon, for instance, is largely ignored in most of the Anglophone 'guides' to Deleuze.

[46] It may be referred to as *orgiastic* because a generative principle is implied, or, as Deleuze poetically phrases it, "tumult, restlessness and passion underneath apparent calm" (Deleuze 2004:54) is discovered.

and opposition that constitute possible relations of identity. This involves, for example an analogy between two identities.[47] Representation, whether finite or infinite, continues to assume the existence of what must be explained (as I have discussed above), i.e., individuated reality.[48] This critique of representation serves as a basis for the dogmatic image of thought, to which I now turn.

In a preface to the English edition of *Difference and Repetition*, written a quarter of a century after the book's initial French publication, Deleuze reflects on the aims of his project and notes that the third chapter on the dogmatic image of thought now seems the most important to him, especially as it provides the basis for his later work with Guattari, specifically the "vegetal model of thought: the rhizome in opposition to the tree, a rhizome-thought instead of an arborescent thought" (Deleuze 2004:xiv) developed in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). As Henry Somers-Hall summarises, the central claim of this chapter "is that the traditional image of thought mistakes a representation of thinking for thinking itself, or, to put the matter differently, thinking in terms of judgement is unaware that its foundations cannot themselves be understood in terms of judgement" (Somers-Hall 2013:97). He clarifies that "Deleuze's problem with the image of thought is not that it is just a representation of thought, but rather that it takes this representation, which is a moment of thinking, to be the entirety of thought" (ibid.). Furthermore, "[t]o the extent that it holds in principle, this image presupposes a certain distribution of the empirical and the transcendental" (Deleuze 2004:176). Deleuze introduces his critique of the dogmatic image by observing that:

> Conceptual philosophical thought has as its implicit presupposition a pre-philosophical and natural Image of thought, borrowed from the pure element of common sense. According to this image, thought has an affinity with the true; it formally possesses the true and materially wants the true. It is in terms of this image that everybody knows and is presumed to know what it means to think. Thereafter it matters little whether

[47] Deleuze's discussion of Hegel and Leibniz's failure to move beyond representation is highly detailed and we cannot do justice to it here; in the easier case of Hegel, however, it should be intuitively clear how a principle of contradiction or sublation/self-overcoming assumes the primacy of identity even in the (self-)negation of that identity. As Deleuze states at one point, negation "is the shadow of a more profound genetic element" (Deleuze 2004:70).

[48] This entails not just the existence of the individual identities and concepts comprising this reality, but, as with epistemology, logic and so forth, principles that appear to be primary but are in fact emergent, down to the very schema of their being – this includes both objective space and time themselves. For Deleuze, neither Leibniz nor Hegel's systems are able to compellingly account for this.

> philosophy begins with the object or the subject, with Being or with beings, as long as thought remains subject to this Image which already prejudges everything: the distribution of the object and the subject as well as that of Being and beings. We may call this image of thought a dogmatic, orthodox or moral image (Deleuze 2004:174).[49]

Deleuze differentiates between two types of presuppositions here: objective and subjective. He associates the former with Platonist-style metaphysical assumptions about the composition of the world, whereas he identifies the latter specifically with Descartes, who seeks to eradicate all objective presuppositions in his famous account of reflective subjectivity, but remains beholden to more insidious assumptions about the nature of this reflecting subject. In either case, we're faced with a situation where "[e]verybody knows, no one can deny, is the form of representation and the discourse of the representative" (ibid.:172). It is useful here to think about representation in the literal sense of 're-presentation': Deleuze's critique of representation in fact extends Feuerbach's observation that there is a difference between thought and how we represent that thought (e.g., through words). As Somers-Hall explains, for Feuerbach, as for Deleuze, "philosophers become prone to a form of paralogism whereby they mistake the successive, abstract representation of thinking for thinking itself" (Somers-Hall 2013:101). Furthermore, "to trust in the structure of thinking as communicative implies a fundamental accord between man and the world" (ibid.), something that, as we will see when we discuss the first two postulates, is not necessarily the case.

Deleuze thus seeks to eradicate both forms of presupposition, and to get beyond the representation of thought as a necessary condition for "a philosophy which would be without any kind of presuppositions" (Deleuze 2004:175) – a thought without an image. Such a philosophy would take as its "point of departure a radical critique of … [the dogmatic] Image and the 'postulates' it implies" (ibid.). Deleuze proceeds to exhaustively describe the dogmatic image via eight postulates that he argues are common to almost all

[49] Deleuze will also sometimes discuss the dogmatic image in terms of *doxa*, and we can understand his occasionally confusing use of the idea of paradox in *Difference and Repetition*, *Logic of Sense* and elsewhere better if we think about the etymology of these related terms. Doxa has the sense of opinion or appearance, while the prefix *para-* is most often used in the sense of 'protection from'; paradox, in the Deleuzian sense anyway, thus bears the sense of protection from opinion or the dogmatic image. Deleuze will reserve some of his most amusing words to describe the banality of doxa that passes for philosophical thought, arguing that "[t]his is the Western democratic, popular conception of philosophy as providing pleasant or aggressive dinner conversations at Mr. Rorty's" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:144).

philosophical thought, even though they take various forms (the operation of the postulates within empiricism, for instance, is different to that within rationalism (ibid.:174)). These are the postulates of the principle, or *cogitatio natura universalis*, the ideal, or common sense, the model, or recognition, the element, or representation, the negative, or error, the logical function, or the proposition, the modality, or solutions, and the end, or knowledge. The first four postulates deal broadly with the relationship between thought and the world, whereas the second four focus more on questions around language, meaning and communication vis-à-vis this relationship, topics that are more typically the purview of analytic philosophy. I will briefly examine each of the postulates in turn.

2.3.1 The postulate of the principle, or *Cogitatio natura universalis*

Deleuze explains the first postulate by describing how we tend to assume what he calls the good will of the thinking and the good nature of thought; in other words, that we have a natural proclivity for thought and that thought in turn has a natural affinity with the 'true'. Deleuze continues that "[i]t is because everybody naturally thinks that everybody is supposed to know implicitly what it means to think. The most general form of representation is thus found in the element of a common sense understood as an upright nature and a good will" (Deleuze 2004:173). Deleuze is not arguing here that philosophers are necessarily trapped within specific assumptions about what form this good will and good nature take. However, even if all that philosophers, *ceteris paribus*, propose "as universally recognised is what is meant by thinking, being and self – in other words, not a particular this or that but the form of representation or recognition in general", there remains a "supposition that thought is the natural exercise of a faculty, of the presupposition that there is a natural capacity for thought endowed with a talent for truth" (ibid.).

2.3.2 The postulate of the ideal, or common sense

While Deleuze begins his discussion of common sense in his description of the first postulate, it is in the second postulate that he properly interrogates what is meant by this term, drawing it into relation with its correlate, good sense. Simply put, common sense is a set of assumptions

about subjectivity[50]. Specifically, Deleuze is drawing critical attention to the Kantian notion of the concord of the faculties, and the earlier Cartesian understanding of the cogito. As its counterpart, this view assumes a certain distribution (a 'good sense') of things in the world – in other words, we encounter the equivalent of Porphyry's tree again, "when all the faculties together relate their given and relate themselves to a form of identity in the object" (Deleuze 2004:176). As Deleuze describes it, under the postulate of the ideal, "the form of identity in objects relies upon a ground in the unity of a thinking subject" (ibid.). It is, "[f]or Kant as for Descartes", the unified "identity of the Self in the 'I think' which grounds the harmony of all the faculties and their agreement on the form of a supposed Same object" (ibid.). Deleuze summarises this postulate by stating that while "common sense is the norm of identity from the point of view of the pure Self and the form of the unspecified object which corresponds to it, good sense is the norm of distribution from the point of view of the empirical selves and the objects qualified as this or that kind of thing (which is why it is considered to be universally distributed)" (ibid.:177). In an ontogenetic view, we can immediately see the problems with what Deleuze is critiquing: assuming a certain stable distribution of subjects and objects, and a correlative distribution of that which comprises each of those subjects and objects, elides the individuating on behalf of the individuated, and mistakes a particular phase of being for the entire metastable being, whether this phase be an object in the world or an aspect of thought/subjectivity. I will indicate below how combatting this deceptive view entails instead thinking in terms of a *discord* of the faculties and an *ill-will* of thought.

2.3.3 The postulate of the model, or recognition

The third postulate continues the discussion of the unified nature of objects as the correlate of a unified subject. Joe Hughes explains that within this postulate "the object is supposed the same for each faculty: sensibility, imagination, memory and thought all confront one and the same object" (Hughes 2009:72). As should be becoming clear, there is a slippery aspect to Deleuze's delineation of the eight postulates: instead of being entirely distinct, they tend to overlap, blur into and reiterate each other. For instance, when discussing the third postulate in terms of a reflection of Descartes' famous meditation on the piece of wax that continues to be

[50] Somers-Hall observes that Deleuze in fact uses the idea of common sense in two related ways: first to describe said assumptions about subjectivity, but also in the more everyday register of what people have in common in this regard, i.e., 'everybody knows' (Somers-Hall 2013:101).

the same object of recognition even as we transform all of its properties, Deleuze observes that "recognition thus relies upon a subjective principle of collaboration of the faculties for 'everybody' – in other words, a common sense as a concordia facultatum; while simultaneously, for the philosopher, the form of identity in objects relies upon a ground in the unity of a thinking subject, of which all the other faculties must be modalities" (Deleuze 2004:176). In other words, the idea of recognition serves as a kind of model that relies on good sense and common sense. This reiteration (or difference and repetition) of each postulate in the others is a quintessentially Deleuzian move of embedding the content in the form. It is clear that if he had simply defined eight strictly separated postulates, each with an exhaustively defined identity, he would be doing exactly what he is arguing against, and so his form of argumentation has to itself conform to the principles of individuation he is putting forward.

While this can make Deleuze difficult to read, it also allows for a profound level of systematic consistency that allows readers to begin to think in a more Deleuzian manner. To return to the third postulate, Deleuze states that due to the way in which "good sense and common sense complete each other in the image of thought … they constitute the two halves of the *doxa*" (ibid.:177). This "is a hindrance to philosophy" because the combination of good and common sense in the model of recognition, and therefore a "naturally upright thought, an in principle natural common sense, and a transcendental model of recognition", constitute an orthodoxy and leave philosophy "without means to realise its project of breaking with doxa" (ibid.). More bluntly put, "[t]he form of recognition has never sanctioned anything but the recognisable and the recognised; form will never inspire anything but conformities" (ibid.:178). Certainly, recognition allows us to navigate the everyday world of tables, apples and pieces of wax, but when it comes to philosophy, "who can believe that the destiny of thought is at stake in these acts, and that when we recognise, we are thinking?" (ibid.). Instead, as Deleuze develops the remaining postulates, he will call for a Nietzschean transvaluation of values premised precisely upon the unrecognisable[51], "the powers of a completely other model" (ibid.:179). After all,

[51] It is interesting to note here that Deleuze defines the unrecognisable, which bears strong similarities to Foucault's 'unthought in thought', as a positive creative principle. Here, as in many places, Deleuze's project can perhaps be thought of as transforming the analytic of finitude in a Nietzschean direction that seeks to overcome passive nihilism. As he describes it, "[t]he new – in other words, difference – calls forth forces in thought which are not the forces of recognition, today or tomorrow, but the powers of a completely other model, from an unrecognised and unrecognisable terra incognita. What forces does this new bring to bear upon thought, from what central bad nature and ill will does it spring, from what central ungrounding which strips thought of its 'innateness', and treats it every time as something which has not always existed, but begins, forced and under constraint?" (Deleuze 2004:179). Similarly, there are clear resonances between Foucault's idea of the episteme

"[w]hat is a thought which harms no one, neither thinkers nor anyone else? Recognition is a sign of the celebration of monstrous nuptials, in which thought 'rediscovers' the State, rediscovers 'the Church' and rediscovers all the current values that it subtly presented in the pure form of an eternally blessed unspecified eternal object" (ibid.). And, lest we consider this merely an abstract problem for philosophical thought, Deleuze reminds us that struggles – political or otherwise – that are premised upon the postulate of recognition "occur only on the basis of a common sense and established values, for the attainment of current values (honours, wealth and power)" (ibid.:180), and that the pursuit of such values is responsible for much of the bloody history of humanity.

2.3.4 The postulate of the element, or representation

As before, the fourth postulate reiterates and to some extent generalises the previous postulates. Specifically, Deleuze claims that "the search for the true, the relations among the faculties, and the relation of the faculties to the object" all unfold "within the element of representation" (Hughes 2009:72). This is the same fourfold root of representation, which reduces difference to identity, analogy, resemblance and opposition, as was discussed earlier. We already know that it "fails to capture the affirmed world of difference" because it "has only a single centre, a unique and receding perspective, and in consequence a false depth. It mediates everything, but mobilises and moves nothing" (Deleuze 2004:70). Through representation, "difference becomes an object of representation always in relation to a conceived identity, a judged analogy, an imagined opposition or a perceived similitude" (ibid.:182).

Specifically, *identity* is what constitutes the form of the 'same' that we encountered when we discussed common sense; while *analogy* is responsible for the relation between subject and objects in recognition; *opposition* is what determines concepts in relation to each other; and *resemblance* establishes the conditions for good sense: "the object of the concept, in itself or in relation to other objects" (ibid.). In short, it is upon these "quadripartite fetters" that "difference is crucified" (ibid.) – the individuated is assumed and its principle of individuation is sought in precisely that which requires explanation: the world of representation consisting of a

and the dogmatic image, although they should not by any means be reduced to each other, being focused on historical conditions and detailed exegesis of the conditioned respectively.

particular established relation and set of stable distributions between thought and world. After discussing the fourth postulate, there is a brief interlude where Deleuze presents what he calls the "differential/disjunctive theory of the faculties". In order to keep my exposition clear, I will break step with Deleuze and return to this at the end of our discussion, keeping in mind that this interregnum serves to partly separate the two clusters of postulates.

2.3.5 The postulate of the negative, or error

The second four postulates are slightly more straightforward than the first four. Here, Deleuze is focused on the popular image of what it means to do philosophy that we regularly encounter in, for instance, some more analytically inflected schools of thought that situate their origins in the work of Russell, Wittgenstein and others.[52] This image preferences or assumes a didactic model of thought and argumentation that views features like the truth and falsehood of statements, propositional logic, the elimination of problems in their solutions and the production of a stable taxonomically structured field of knowledge as centrally salient[53]. As I will show, however, the grounds for such an image are slippery and uneven, a thin veneer of sense liable to giving way to a chasm of non-sense at any moment.

With regard to the fifth postulate, Deleuze's claim here is deceptively simple: we should not reduce the misadventures of thought to error. Of course, in our everyday lives the relationship between truth and error is relatively straightforward: mistaking a red traffic light for a green one, for instance, is something we hopefully try hard to avoid, and it is legitimate to lend the 'form of the true' to its negative, the false, when this happens (i.e., it was a failure of recognition of the true that led to me skipping the lights). However, does this hold for thought as a whole, especially for speculative thought? As Deleuze will argue, in a somewhat scathing tone, it is in fact the case that "[e]rror acquires a sense only once the play of thought ceases to

[52] This is not unique to analytic philosophy, of course. Badiou, albeit in a less obvious manner, and despite his reflexive equivocations, arguably also falls prey to some of these postulates in the exposition of his set-theoretic ontology.

[53] Alliez, describing the limits of philosophical approaches that rely on the postulates mentioned below, argues that they are, when they attempt to ground their own functioning, simply "a reversal of the 'ontological argument' formulated by the philosophical tradition, from Saint Anselm to Hegel passing through Descartes, as *a priori* proof of the existence of God", and reminds us of the well-known circularity of this argument (Alliez 2004:106). He continues: "[R]emove the name of God from this demonstration and you will witness the emergence of the purest form of the logical ideal (or the 'theorematic' ideal, according to Deleuze's expression) of mathematical representation, when that representation claims to guarantee *a priori* the correlation between thought and the most abstract being, emptied of any materiality by its absolute depotentialization" (ibid.).

be speculative and becomes a kind of radio quiz" (Deleuze 2004:196). In this regard, "[e]rror is only the reverse of a rational orthodoxy, still testifying on behalf of that from which it is distanced – in other words, on behalf of an honesty, a good nature and a good will on the part of the one who is said to be mistaken" (ibid.:194). To reduce the misadventures of thought to error, is therefore simply to reproduce the entire structure of representation through inversion, asserting a simple failure of good sense or recognition, when in fact thought "has other misadventures besides error: humiliations more difficult to overcome, negatives much more difficult to unravel … madness, stupidity and malevolence can no more be reduced to error than they can be reduced to any form of the same" (ibid.:195). This difficulty is due to the fact that misadventures like "[c]owardice, cruelty, baseness and stupidity are not simply corporeal capacities or traits of character or society; they are structures of thought as such" (ibid.:197). What does it mean for these misadventures, however, to be 'structures of thought'? James Williams reminds us that Deleuze's discussion of error takes place in the broader context of his philosophy of individuation, wherein "[o]ur thoughts reflect the physical and biological but also the virtual repetitions that have made us individual thinkers as opposed to identical subjects and selves defined by right" (Williams 2004:134). In this regard, what we tend to reduce to error, in a simple inversion of the principles of identity, analogy, resemblance and opposition that similarly reduces individuation to the individuated, is in fact one or another "relation in which individuation brings the ground to the surface without being able to give it form" (Deleuze 2004:199). To reiterate our earlier discussion of problematic fields, phenomena like stupidity are also the result of not practicing vice-diction in ways that give rise to interesting problems and solutions, and instead accepting "banalities mistaken for profundities, ordinary 'points' confused with singular points, badly posed or distorted problems—all heavy with dangers, yet the fate of us all" (ibid.:200). The implications for philosophy are made wholly explicit when Deleuze observes that:

> We doubt whether, when mathematicians engage in polemic, they criticize one another for being mistaken in the results of their calculations. Rather, they criticize one another for having produced an insignificant theorem or a problem devoid of sense. Philosophy must draw the conclusions which follow from this (Deleuze 2004:200).

2.3.6 The postulate of the logical function, or the proposition

Deleuze describes the sixth postulate, which he also refers to as the postulate of designation, as both incorporating and following on from the previous postulates, and states that it is merely the "logical form of recognition" (Deleuze 2004:201). When we designate or denote something, we are relying on a theory of reference, which in turn assumes recognition (we can't refer to anything if there is no framework of recognition at play). In terms of this view, reference serves as the locus of truth, and sense[54] is "no more than the neutralised double or the infinite doubling of the proposition" (ibid.:217). This critical engagement with the relation between sense and designation, which receives only an abstruse gloss in *Difference and Repetition*, is one of the fundamental themes explored in *The Logic of Sense* (Deleuze 1990), and is in fact a founding aspect of analytic philosophy, originating in Frege's distinction between meaning and reference in his discussion of Venus, popularly referred to as both the 'morning star' and the 'evening star' – two heterogeneous senses with the same astrophysical referent. The complex relationship between sense and designation is grappled with in myriad ways by philosophers, and there is a prominent tendency, in Deleuze's view, to render sense secondary in this regard and to view designation as determining the truth or falsity – as well as the sense – of a statement. The problem with this reduction of sense to designation, however, is that "[d]esignation is simply a relation whereby either the structure of the proposition mirrors a state of affairs in the world (and hence is true), or does not (and hence is false)". It thereby reiterates several other aspects of the dogmatic image of thought, and "cannot capture the significance, or sense, of a proposition, because what a proposition expresses is not a correspondence between a state of affairs and a proposition, but rather the beliefs of the speaker who asserts the proposition" (Somers-Hall 2013:123).

Simply put, there is no necessary relation between what is designated in a proposition and the meaning of that proposition. Deleuze is particularly straightforward in stating that "[we] always have as much truth as we deserve in accordance with the sense of what we say" (Deleuze 2004:201). This is because within the ontogenetic view "truth is a matter of production, not of adequation. It is a matter of genitality, not of innateness or reminiscence … [s]ense is the

[54] Deleuze typically, though not exclusively, employs the term *sense* (*sens* in French) to connote 'meaning'.

genesis or the production of the true, and truth is only the empirical result of sense" (ibid.).[55] When we forget this, we again trace ontogenesis from ontology, "elevating a simple empirical figure to the status of a transcendental, at the risk of allowing the real structures of the transcendental to fall into the empirical" (ibid.). Deleuze invokes various forms of infinite regress, circularity and nonsense. He returns to these themes in much greater detail in *The Logic of Sense*, to describe how thought runs up against its limits in this tracing, observing how, for instance, grounding thinking in the cogito results in the indefinite regress of "I think that I think that I think …" and arguing that in fact "[e]very proposition of consciousness implies an unconscious of pure thought which *constitutes* the sphere of sense in which there is infinite regress" (ibid.:203; emphasis added).

2.3.7 The postulate of the modality, or solutions

Deleuze is perhaps at his most cynical when describing the seventh postulate "of responses and solutions according to which truth and falsehood only begin with solutions or only qualify responses" (Deleuze 2004:206-7). This postulate is essentially a recapitulation of his argument earlier in *Difference and Repetition* that we tend to reduce problems to solutions, in this case by conferring a propositional form to them[56] that results in ready-made problems that are traced from established answers. This leads to the kind of "grotesque image of culture that we find in examinations and government referenda, as well as in newspaper competitions (where everyone is called upon to choose according to his or her taste, on condition that this taste coincides with that of everyone else)" (ibid.:206). It is worth citing Deleuze in full here:

> We are led to believe that problems are given ready-made, and that they disappear in the responses or the solution … We are led to believe that the activity of thinking, along with truth and falsehood in relation to that activity, begins only with the search for solutions, that both of these concern only solutions. This belief probably has the same origin as the other postulates of the dogmatic image: puerile examples taken out of context and arbitrarily erected into models. According to this infantile prejudice, the

[55] The term truth, in Deleuze, should be understood not in a veridical register but as a measure of our relation to well-formed problems. This may seem like a willfully obscure way of defining truth, but it is in fact the natural result of the philosophy of difference, which is, as we have seen, a philosophy of individuation anterior to the forms of thought that are presupposed by more traditional notions of truth.

[56] "The problem is simply a syntactical modification of the proposition. As such, it is parasitic on the structure of the propositional solutions that appear to emerge from it" (Somers-Hall 2013:125).

> master sets a problem, our task is to solve it, and the result is accredited true or false by a powerful authority. It is also a social prejudice with the visible interest of maintaining us in an infantile state, which calls upon us to solve problems that come from elsewhere (Deleuze 2004:206).

I have already shown how problems continue to inhere in their solutions as a pre-individual charge that can result in further individuations. By reducing problems to solutions, then, we are seeking to reify the established, whether it be in the domain of philosophy, politics, science or love, and eviscerating the pluripotence of becoming on behalf of a particular phase of being. This reification is "[a] strange leap on the spot or vicious circle by which philosophy, claiming to extend the truth of solutions to problems themselves but remaining imprisoned by the dogmatic image, refers the truth of problems to the possibility of their solution" (ibid.:210), and it is thus fundamentally at odds with philosophy's attempt to think the new, subjecting us to the present (in both senses of that term) as the horizon of possibility. However, we will "remain slaves so long as we do not control the problems themselves, so long as we do not possess a right to the problems, to a participation in and management of the problems" (ibid.:206).

2.3.8 The postulate of the end, or knowledge

There is, finally, an eighth postulate that seeks to subordinate learning to knowledge and culture to method. Following from all the previous postulates, we can see how the intersecting principles of good and common sense, representation, error, solutions and so forth – when taken together – all tend to result in an image of thinking centred upon the production of a stable and growing field of knowledge as a collection of propositional solutions. This final postulate is reasonably straightforward, and Deleuze does not spend much time discussing it. Instead, he poses the question of what could replace the dogmatic image of thought that crushes "thought under an image which is that of the Same and the Similar in representation, but profoundly betrays what it means to think and alienates the two powers of difference and repetition, of philosophical commencement and recommencement" (Deleuze 2004:217). Instead, the form of thought we seek is "[t]he thought which is born in thought, the act of thinking which is neither given by innateness nor presupposed by reminiscence but engendered in its genitality". This is not a new image of thought, but "a thought without image" (ibid.). I will briefly explore what this means.

2.4 A disjunctive pedagogy of the creation of concepts

> *The brain is part of the material world; the material world is not part of the brain.* (Bergson 1994:19)

> *The philosopher is expert in concepts and in the lack of them. He knows which of them are not viable, which are arbitrary or inconsistent, which ones do not hold up for an instant. On the other hand, he also knows which are well formed and attest to a creation, however disturbing or dangerous it may be."* (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:3)

As I discussed earlier, Deleuze describes the new form of thought he is proposing as learning and reiterates that "knowledge that is nothing more than an empirical figure, a simple result which continually falls back into experience; whereas learning is the true transcendental structure which unites difference to difference, dissimilarity to dissimilarity, without mediating between them; and introduces time into thought" (Deleuze 2004:216). In short, learning, understood in this broad sense, is precisely the thought of individuation as the individuation of thought. As Eric Alliez elaborates that "this intuitive and problematic method will involve the reality of philosophy as an experience by manifesting the bad will required to 'chase away ready-made concepts' – the concepts of representation – in order to pose problems afresh, to match the articulations of the real and follow its tendencies rather than let oneself be guided by the conservative logic of common sense, which limits itself to choosing between solutions sedimented in language" (Alliez 2004:113). Deleuze underscores that "thinking is not innate, but must be engendered in thought", and that the way to do this is "not to direct or methodically apply a thought which pre-exists in principle and in nature, but to bring into being that which does not yet exist" (Deleuze 2004:193). Thinking, he avers, is creation, "but to create is first of all to engender 'thinking' in thought" (ibid.).

This engendering takes place not by virtue of thought's innate proclivity for engendering itself, but because "[s]omething in the world forces us to think", something that "is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter" (ibid.:xiv). In other words, this something that causes us to think is not something we recognise and then reflect upon, but instead "gives rise to sensibility … [i]t is not the given but that by which the given is given" (ibid.:184). The

"something in the world" is, in one sense, what Deleuze will occasionally describe as the dark precursor that unites difference to difference in ways that create a difference in potential, a generative difference (or disparation in Simondon's terms) that is resolved through individuation. Thinking in this manner thus involves seeking out encounters or events that will give rise to new individuations of thought; it is an open, experimental method that is necessarily without final grounds as any grounding takes place within the established and, as we saw when we discussed the circularity of the postulates, is thus merely a provisional phase of being that itself requires grounding[57].

Thinking as learning, as Deleuze explains when he discusses the disjunctive theory of the faculties, ruptures good and common sense by pushing each faculty to its limits and performing a violence to it that forces it to encounter that which it cannot empirically grasp, i.e., that which transcends it[58]. To summarise, for Deleuze thought is thus in every way a deeply creative act, and it is in precisely this way that he will discuss philosophy as "the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:2) in his final book, *What is Philosophy?*[59].

It may seem quite unusual that, given the focus of this mini-dissertation, I have chosen to focus on Deleuze's earlier work and not on a book whose very title promises to directly answer my central question: what *is* philosophy? However, while answering this question is indeed one of the aims of the later book, the conversation there is profoundly compressed and assumes a high level of familiarity with the rest of Deleuze's oeuvre. Notably, the entire argument put forward in chapter three of *Difference and Repetition* reappears, albeit in a highly summarised and allusive manner that readers who are unfamiliar with that earlier book, have little hope of understanding. Additionally, much of the later book is spent discussing how philosophy differs

[57] Deleuze's early lectures in *What is Grounding?* already point out the infinite regress involved in grounding, whereby the grounds themselves require grounding ad infinitum, meaning that grounding is essentially an immanent, autopoietic *act* as opposed to an appeal to transcendent premises (Deleuze 2015; see especially 175-6).
[58] The faculties in question are essentially those familiar from Kant, i.e., sensibility, imagination and so on, and Deleuze's argument here relies in part on Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, specifically on the notion of the sublime, which Deleuze sees as in fact subverting the carefully reasoned theory of the faculties Kant sets up in the earlier *Critique of Pure Reason* (Deleuze 1984:50-2). Notably, Deleuze will argue that in the disjunctive exercise of the faculties, we may even discover new faculties as an outcome of the practice of transcendental empiricism (Deleuze 2004:188-9).
[59] *What is Philosophy?* is credited to both Deleuze and Guattari. As their biographer François Dosse points out, however, the book is very obviously written by Deleuze alone, and Deleuze's decision to publish it as a co-authored work is both a radical act of philosophical consistency, *qua* his own views of thinking as encounter, and a profound gesture of friendship (Dosse 2010:456).

from science and art respectively, while maintaining complex imbrications with them, which in turn assumes a deep familiarity with Deleuze's work on topics such as affect, sensation, the baroque, time and so forth. The focus on *Difference and Repetition* was therefore an attempt to present the initial formulation of the ideas about philosophy put forth in *What is Philosophy?* as well as their surrounding context, without digressing into the myriad topics that are explored in the latter. In this regard, even before turning to *What is Philosophy?*, I can provide a provisional answer to the question it poses. It must be kept in mind however, that to be consistent, this question also calls on us to describe a problematic field and thus operates partly as an injunction: philosophy is a materialist, immanent practice – or ethics – of becoming. In the book itself Deleuze introduces numerous new terms: he discusses how philosophy, science and art form three separate planes, each of which 'cuts chaos' in a different way, how thought operates with an infinite speed of 'survey' or self-overview[60]; how philosophy operates with conceptual personae (Nietzsche's Zarathustra, for instance, but also Plato's Socrates); and how analytic-style approaches to philosophy[61] tend to conflate it with science, which has its own operations, to the detriment of both.

Beyond these changes in language and register, however, Deleuze's view remains much the same as it was in *Difference and Repetition*: to do philosophy is to create concepts[62] by individuating provisional solutions to problematic fields; solutions that retain their pre-individual charge. As we are by now aware, these "[c]oncepts are not waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies … [t]hey must be invented, fabricated, or rather created and would be nothing without their creator's signature … and philosophers must distrust most those concepts they did not create themselves" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:5-6). This distrust is a

[60] This involves that thought is both immanent and immediate to itself, without distance. Deleuze derives this idea from Raymond Ruyer's Neo-Finalism (2016:90-103).

[61] Deleuze will also refer to this as court philosophy, alluding to the idea of the court advisor, or even jester, who offers insights or provokes the established order without, however, posing any real threat to its foundations. As he observes, "those who do not renew the image of thought are not philosophers but functionaries who, enjoying a ready-made thought, are not even conscious of the problem and are unaware even of the efforts of those they claim to take as their models" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:51).

[62] Although there is not space to unpack this in detail, concepts, for Deleuze, are multiplicities because each concept, even those elementary and perennial philosophical concepts like 'the One' or 'the other' contain several components. He avers that "[t]here are no simple concepts. Every concept has components and is defined by them ... It is a multiplicity" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:15). For instance, "[t]he other is a possible world as it exists in a face that expresses it and takes shape in a language that gives it a reality. In this sense it is a concept with three inseparable components: possible world, existing face, and real language or speech" (ibid.:17). More technically, a concept is "a multiplicity, an absolute surface or volume, self-referents, made up of a certain number of inseparable intensive variations according to an order of neighborhood, and traversed by a point in a state of survey" (ibid.:32).

crucial aspect of philosophical practice: if we are merely reliant upon the concepts of others – even those of Deleuze – then we are not *doing* philosophy but merely repeating it without difference[63]. We are mistaking ontology for ontogenesis, being for becoming. And besides, "[w]hat would be the value of a philosopher of whom one could say, 'He has created no concepts; he has not created his own concepts'?" (ibid.:6). Once we become mere repeaters of philosophy, we have confused thought and communication, "which only works under the sway of opinions in order to create 'consensus' and not concepts" (ibid.). Deleuze provocatively reminds us in this regard, perhaps with philosophers like Habermas in mind, that "[t]he idea of a Western democratic conversation between friends has never produced a single concept" (ibid.). Deleuze is similarly critical of the ideas of reflection and contemplation we take for granted as core aspects of philosophy. These, like communication, "are not disciplines but machines for constituting Universals in every discipline … [and] [t]he first principle of philosophy is that Universals explain nothing but must themselves be explained" (ibid.:6-7). In other words, because these practices (the calm contemplation of represented concepts) arise in the established, they fall prey to the dogmatic image[64]. In fact, Deleuze cynically notes that philosophising in this way leads only to the kind of thought that can be recuperated by universal capitalism, a system wherein "the simulation of a packet of noodles, has become the true concept; and the one who packages the product, commodity, or work of art has become the philosopher, conceptual persona, or artist" (ibid.:10).

Instead, "the question of philosophy is the singular point where concept and creation are related to each other" (ibid.:11). If we are forced to choose between "the encyclopedia, pedagogy, and commercial professional training" as the three different approaches we can take towards thinking[65], then "only the second can safeguard us from falling from the heights of the

[63] We do, of course, often repeat *with* difference. "If one can still be a Platonist, Cartesian, or Kantian today, it is because one is justified in thinking that their concepts can be reactivated in our problems and inspire those concepts that need to be created" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:28). Deleuze will refer to philosophy as 'stratigraphic' in this way: a new philosophy does not simply replace an old philosophy, but redraws the relations between concepts in new ways, allowing for new unfoldings; the history of philosophy is thus a kind of palimpsest – a coexistence and not a succession of philosophical planes.

[64] This type of thought is singularly uninteresting to Deleuze. As he will argue, "the most universal concepts, those presented as eternal forms or values, are the most skeletal and least interesting. Nothing positive is done, nothing at all, in the domains of either criticism or history, when we are content to brandish ready-made old concepts like skeletons intended to intimidate any creation, without seeing that the ancient philosophers from whom we borrow them were already doing what we would like to prevent modern philosophers from doing: they were creating their concepts, and they were not happy just to clean and scrape bones like the critic and historian of our time" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:83).

[65] When Deleuze refers to the encyclopaedia he has the second four postulates of the dogmatic image in mind.

first into the disaster of the third" (ibid.:12). In taking the second path of a creative pedagogy of the concept, we should also be reminded that concepts function not in isolation but enjoy complex relationships and reciprocal becomings with other concepts. There is a junction of problems where "concepts link up with each other, support one another, coordinate their contours, articulate their respective problems, and belong to the same philosophy, even if they have different histories" (ibid.:18). This is necessarily the case simply because the creation of concepts is the specification of problematic fields; a problem can be individuated in multiple ways and inheres in its provisional individuations/solutions, and concepts are thus complexly imbricated with each other, with each concept enjoying a "zone of neighborhood, or a threshold of indiscernibility, with another one" (ibid.:19).[66] Crucially, "[t]he concept is an incorporeal, even though it is incarnated or effectuated in bodies … [t]he concept speaks the event, not the essence or the thing, pure Event, a haecceity, an entity" (ibid.:21). In other words, the concept is what we individuate by thinking, by creating an encounter for thought, but it is not itself individuated – it is not, like a scientific theorem[67], something we can simply write down or speak as a set of words that calmly conveys the result of reasoned contemplation upon the established.

Of course, "[p]hilosophy proceeds by sentences, but it is not always propositions that are extracted from sentences in general" (ibid.:24). Instead, there is a kind of autopoiesis of the concept, whereby "it is self-referential; it posits itself and its object at the same time as it is created" (ibid.:22). We do not have the space to more fully explore the highly detailed notion of the concept – or conceptual personae or the plane of immanence – here[68]. Rather, I will make

[66] Deleuze will thus describe concepts as having a phase space, i.e., the space of possible states a system can occupy, although he will state that this phase space does not take the same form as it does within science (a phase space of scientific objects would map the possibility space of individuated objects in terms of properties, whereas the space of possibility of the pre-individuated, i.e., the virtual, would diagram not properties but that which gives rise to properties, i.e., difference differing).

[67] "[T]he concept is not discursive, and philosophy is not a discursive formation, because it does not link propositions together. Confusing concept and proposition produces a belief in the existence of scientific concepts and a view of the proposition as a genuine 'intension' (what the sentence expresses). Consequently, the philosophical concept usually appears only as a proposition deprived of sense. This confusion reigns in logic and explains its infantile idea of philosophy. Concepts are measured against a "philosophical" grammar that replaces them with propositions extracted from the sentences in which they appear. We are constantly trapped between alternative propositions and do not see that the concept has already passed into the excluded middle" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:22).

[68] To offer perhaps the most succinct definition Deleuze provides, "[p]hilosophy presents three elements, each of which fits with the other two but must be considered for itself: the prephilosophical plane it must lay out (immanence), the persona or personae it must invent and bring to life (insistence), and the philosophical concepts it must create (consistency). Laying out, inventing, and creating constitute the philosophical trinity-diagrammatic, personalistic, and intensive features. Concepts are grouped according to whether they resonate or throw out

use of Alliez's summary of the philosophical propositions set out in *What is Philosophy?*, and will in closing consider their consequences.

For Alliez, Deleuze sets out four key propositions. First, that "[p]hilosophy must constitute itself as the theory of what we do and not as the theory of what is, because thought only says what it is by saying what it does" (Alliez 2004:90). We have seen already what this active, creative approach to thought entails. Second, "[p]hilosophy is indissociable from a theory of intensive multiplicities insofar as intuition as method is an anti-dialectical method of research and affirmation of difference in the play of the actual and the virtual" (ibid.:92). In other words, the practice of vice-diction, of determining problems well in order to obtain meaningfully solutions, is crucial. Third, "[i]f the affirmation of the multiple is the speculative proposition and joy in the diverse the practical proposition, then we must affirm philosophy as this nomad thought that creates concepts as so many manners of being and modes of existence" (ibid.:94). To affirm the multiple is to acknowledge that the pre-individual or ontogenetic is not exhausted in its individuation, and that there are myriad other phases of becoming inherent in any given thought or being. Problems persist in their solutions, and other ways are possible. This is the infinite repository on which philosophy draws – a repository not of ideal forms or extant concepts or bodies of knowledge, but one instead of creative dynamism, of difference differing. Fourth, and similarly, "[a]s an Ethics of Thought-Being, an ethics of relations countering the doctrines of judgment with the powers of life, philosophy is an onto-ethology insofar as its concepts form so many possible worlds and events extracted from the movement of an infinite real-virtual" (ibid.:95). Philosophy thus has an ethics, one that is entirely immanent and entails that, in the creation of concepts, one should "extract an event from things and beings, to set up the new event from things and beings, always to give them a new event: space, time, matter, thought, the possible as events" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:33). This ethics of the event is perhaps the most fundamental aspect of philosophical practice for Deleuze. It is a practice "through which the subject remains subject, refusing to become an absolute individual, a closed domain of reality, or a detached singularity" (Simondon 2020:380), and which

mobile bridges, covering the same plane of immanence that connects them to one another. There are families of planes according to whether the infinite movements of thought fold within one another and compose variations of curvature or, on the contrary, select noncomposable varieties. There are types of persona according to the possibilities of even their hostile encounters on the same plane and in a group. But it is often difficult to determine if it is the same group, the same type, or the same family. A whole "taste" is needed here" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:76-7).

understands “being as pre-individuated, individuating, and tending toward the continuous that reconstructs in an organized form of communication a reality as vast as the pre-individual system” (ibid).

2.5 Conclusion: The infinite game

Towards the end of *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze describes ethics in terms of becoming worthy to the throw of the dice. It is a strange digression, especially when he describes the game of dice as taking place on two tables: there is a finite game, in which chance is distributed across throws as the slow accumulation of probabilities, and there is an infinite game, in which the whole of chance is bound up in every throw. When we consider, however, that in the finite game, the game that takes place within the established, or individuated, we are merely redistributing what there *is* in the world, while in the infinite game we are *bringing forth into* the world, we can then understand why Deleuze says that we should see “the whole sky as open space and … throwing as the only rule” (Deleuze 2004:259). To throw the dice is to enter into a problematic field; to allow for new individuations or events to take place; to practice vice-diction; and to create concepts. “The singular points are on the die; the questions are the dice themselves; the imperative is to throw. Ideas are the problematic combinations which result from throws” (ibid.).

In contrast to the finite game, where the imperative to throw “is moralised into the principle of choosing the best hypothesis which determines a win … the throw of the dice affirms chance every time … [t]he repetition of throws is not subject to the persistence of the same hypothesis, nor to the identity of a constant rule” (ibid.). Making chance an object of affirmation, Deleuze says, is the hardest thing there is, but it is the fundamental task of thinking[69]. The implications

[69] “What does it mean, therefore, to affirm the whole of chance, every time, in a single time? This affirmation takes place to the degree that the disparates which emanate from a throw begin to resonate, thereby forming a problem. The whole of chance is then indeed in each throw, even though this be partial, and it is there in a single time even though the combination produced is the object of a progressive determination. The throw of the dice carries out the calculation of problems, the determination of differential elements or the distribution of singular points which constitute a structure. The circular relation between imperatives and the problems which follow from them is formed in this manner. Resonance constitutes the truth of a problem as such, in which the imperative is tested, even though the problem itself is born of the imperative. Once chance is affirmed, all arbitrariness is abolished every time. Once chance is affirmed, divergence itself is the object of affirmation within a problem” (Deleuze 2004:260).

of Deleuze's thought for philosophy are clear. As he says, "[t]he greatness of a philosophy is measured by the nature of the events to which its concepts summon us or that it enables us to release in concepts" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:34). To bring forth the event and to be worthy of what happens, this is Deleuze's repetition of Nietzsche's eternal return, a return wherein it is precisely difference that repeats. This may result in a strange sort of philosophy that appears more like a groping experimentation, and that "resorts to measures that are not very respectable, rational, or reasonable", measures that belong "to the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness, and excess", wherein we "head for the horizon, on the plane of immanence, and we return with bloodshot eyes", and yet "[t]o think is always to follow the witch's flight" (ibid.:41). There are no transcendent criteria here, and in fact "[t]here is not the slightest reason for thinking that modes of existence need transcendent values by which they could be compared, selected, and judged relative to one another" (ibid.:74). In the infinite game, there are only immanent criteria, and the becoming of a concept is "evaluated through itself in the movements it lays out and the intensities it creates on a plane of immanence … there are never any criteria other than the tenor of existence, the intensification of life" (ibid.).

In short, "[p]hilosophy's sole aim is to become worthy of the event" (ibid.:160). In comprehensively dismantling the commonplace image of philosophy many of us hold, and pulling the ground out from beneath our feet to reveal the gaping chasm we thought we could cover up with only the flimsiest tapestry of circularly-justifying assumptions, Deleuze is inviting us to play a very different game to the one we're used to. It is a game that, while challenging at first, liberates us from the tyranny of what is and allows for the possibility of the new, the truly new, not just once, but for all time; again and again. And because the only rule is to throw, we can start whenever we want:

> The system of the future … must be called a divine game, since there is no pre-existing rule, since the game bears already upon its own rules, and since the child-player can only win, all of chance being affirmed each time and for all times. Not restricted or limiting affirmations, but affirmations coextensive with the questions posed and with the decisions from which these emanate: such a game entails the repetition of the necessarily winning move, since it wins by embracing all possible combinations and rules in the system of its own return (Deleuze 2004:148).

As richly rewarding as such a view of philosophy undoubtedly is, a lingering question remains: is this game, the infinite game of being worthy of chance and the event, one that philosophy has sole or preferential traction over? In answering this question, I will now turn to the work of François Laruelle and his arcane practice of non-standard philosophy.

3. Laruelle and the continent of flat thoughts

3.1 Introduction

> *Enivrée et bâtardisée par Platon, chauffée à blanc, concentrée-cogitée, liquéfiée par Descartes, moralisée par Kant, fouettée par Sade, ingurgitée par Hegel, dégorgée par Stirner, fonctionnarisée par Husserl, mâchée-ruminée par Nietzsche, avalée de travers par Derrida, tournée-versée par Heidegger, chiée par Deleuze, vomie par Laruelle. C'est qu'elle en redemanderait si on la laissait faire!* (Laruelle 2005:123)
>
> (*Inebriated and bastardized by Plato, liquefied and cogitated into concentrate by Descartes, moralized by Kant, whipped by Sade, devoured by Hegel, disgorged by Stirner, conscripted by Husserl, chewed out by Nietzsche, down the wrong pipe of Derrida, turned over by Heidegger, crapped out by Deleuze, thrown up by Laruelle. And it would ask for more if we let it!*)[70]

In the previous two chapters we have sought to critically interrogate the ways in which thought – specifically philosophical thought – is conditioned in various ways by the episteme in which it takes place and its reflexive finitude, as well as by the way thought comes to be through the process of individuation. It may seem that we have already provided a severe delimitation of thought and afforded it a much more modest role, as a contingent and ungrounded experimental practice that represents only one phase of becoming, than the dogmatic image

[70] English translation by Jeremy R. Smith at https://endemictheory.wordpress.com/2021/08/19/translation-of-francois-laruelle-the-obscenity-of-philosophy-from-theorie-rebellion-2005/.

may lead us to assume. There is, however, another way in which thought in general, but philosophy most egregiously, misconceives of its own functioning in assuming that it is sufficient for thinking the real, and the world as such, as inherently philosophisable. It is to this *Principle of Sufficiency of Philosophy*, as François Laruelle terms it, which is related to a structural invariant of philosophy he calls the *Philosophical Decision*, that I now turn. First, however, it is worth briefly introducing Laruelle, given that he is less well known than Foucault and Deleuze. Part of the same broad post-68 generation as the subjects of our previous two chapters, Laruelle, an emeritus professor of philosophy, has spent the past four decades developing an entirely new practice of thought that is popularly known as non-philosophy. Here, the *non-* should not be understood as a *not* or an *anti-*. Instead, we can think of it as operating in roughly the same way as the non- in non-Euclidean geometry. Whereas standard Euclidean geometry operates with five core axioms, non-Euclidean geometry removes the fifth – the notorious parallel postulate that numerous mathematicians have grappled with over the years – and in doing so in fact expands, or generalises, the potential field of application of the remaining axioms. In other words, by simplifying the Euclidean axiomatic system through the removal of one of its axioms, mathematicians like Hilbert, etc., have been able to apply it to a wider range of mathematical objects, including the kinds of curved or topological spaces where the parallel postulate does not hold.

In similar fashion, Laruelle's view is that by removing the Principle of Sufficiency from philosophy, the possibilities for thought are opened up, and in this regard he has in more recent work in fact moved towards referring to his project as *non-standard philosophy*[71] in order to make this clear. These new possibilities for thought are on full display in Laruelle's writing, and can make it exceedingly difficult to read, if only in terms of its strangely alien character. While there are myriad recognisable references in his oeuvre, which consists of over twenty books and which Laruelle describes as taking place in five 'waves' or 'phases'[72], it is also the case that he "often writes as though he comes from another world, replete with its own foreign and radically abstract standards of truth, clarity, and beauty" (Reszitnyk 2014:51). Indeed, while the major influence of everyone from Deleuze, Derrida and Nietzsche to Fichte, Husserl, Henry and Lacan is strikingly evident in all his work (which sometimes reads like a heady German idealism

[71] While for ease of writing we will employ the term non-philosophy throughout, the more accurate descriptor should be borne in mind.
[72] This periodisation of his work reflects a deeply anti-teleological posture, and the term 'phases' can be thought of in a Simondonian register.

filtered through radical phenomenology and structuralism), their concepts are redeployed in oftentimes arcane ways, almost as a kind of raw material for something that does not seem to operate in at all the same way as philosophy. This strangeness is also evident in Laruelle's use of language, specifically syntax: readers are presented with page upon brutally repetitive[73] page of terms like *One-in-One, force-(of)-thought* and *given-without-givenness*, strung together in unwieldy sentences that go way beyond the excesses of Hegel or Heidegger. As Jonathan Fardy observes, this abstruseness is not some form of playful indulgence, but instead reflects the fact that Laruelle "attempts to write against the pull of Philosophical Decision", something that "requires relentless scrutiny of rhetoric and syntax in order to theoretically ensure that the prose of non-philosophy remains estranged from the lures and traps of Philosophical Decision and faithful to the radicality of the Real" (Fardy 2021:21). Laruelle's writing, in other words, is profoundly performative – it attempts to exemplify the thought it is conveying – or simply *is* - in an entirely immanent fashion that eliminates "philosophical distance even at the level of the grapheme in his writing" (Smith 2016:53). In this regard "the intentionally difficult syntax aims not at confusion but at a reorganization of thought itself" (ibid.:2). More precisely, "[n]on-philosophy's creative syntax is a rhetorical measure faithful to the axiom of the Real as autonomous, foreclosed, and decisive for thought" (Fardy 2018:20).

I will examine in a moment what *the Real* is for Laruelle. In the interests of clarity, however, I will briefly address two more key misconceptions about non-philosophy. First, although Laruelle continuously discusses the idea of *the One*, including streams of variants like *One-in-One, (non-)One* and *non-(One)*, he is not making metaphysical claims about any kind of absolute One in the sense that philosophers – and theologians – often do when discussing Being, existence and so on. Nor is he practicing any form of henology, meontology, apophatics or similar. In fact, the object of non-philosophy is not really reality at all, but *philosophy itself*. As Ray Brassier, an early Anglophone populariser of Laruelle's thought observes, it is "not a negation of philosophy but rather an autonomous theoretical practice (or 'science', as Laruelle once liked to call it) which seeks not to supplant or eliminate philosophy but rather to use it as a material and object of study" (Brassier 2007:120). This in turn accounts for the oftentimes highly abstract nature of non-philosophical prose, which is a second-order discourse on

[73] "If the reader is disappointed with my 'programmatic messianism', yes, messianity is what I do. There is nothing else to announce, it must be announced many times, repeated – as Bergson said, a philosopher has only one idea" (Laruelle and Mackay 2012:31).

philosophy, an already abstract proceeding. Second, Laruelle is not focused on critiquing other philosophies. While he has written entire books on other philosophers (*Anti-Badiou*, for example, as well as *Philosophies of Difference*, which engages with Derrida, Deleuze, Heidegger and Nietzsche in a deeply novel manner), one would be hard-pressed to locate in these or other texts anything like the kinds of direct critical engagements that define the usual internecine battles of philosophy – X's critique of Y's reading of Z's metaphysics. Instead, Laruelle views non-philosophy as something more like "the universal dictionary of philosophies; the transcendental idiom in terms of thought which relates to them" (Laruelle 2013a:14). Said otherwise, because non-philosophy wishes not to fall prey to the Philosophical Decision, and because its object is not reality but philosophy itself, "[n]on-philosophy must remain an explicative theoretical hypothesis: it does not confuse itself with its object, with experience; the theory of philosophy is no more philosophical than the idea of a circle is circular" (ibid.:11).

Importantly, this does not mean it is a meta-philosophy: philosophy *per se* is meta-philosophical, being a reflexive practice, and any meta-philosophy would merely reinscribe a Philosophical Decision or Principle of Sufficiency. Fardy observes that "to read non-philosophy as simply a 'critique' of philosophy immediately collapses it back into standard philosophy, which since Kant, has been a critical practice" (Fardy 2020:28). Laruelle will instead refer to non-philosophy as a science of philosophy in this regard, although it should be noted that this is only one side of non-philosophical practice and that it also contains a crucial creative moment that I will explore later. As Anthony Paul Smith underscores, "Laruelle's project is both a 'science of philosophy' (its critical and negative mode as found in the theory of Philosophical Decision) and a 'philo-fiction' (its constructive mode as found in the construction of various new theories)" (2016:27). Laruelle himself explains:

> My problem is really that of how to treat philosophy as a material, and thus also as a materiality—without preoccupying oneself with the aims of philosophy, of its dignity, of its quasi-theological ends, of philosophical virtues, wisdom … None of that interests me. What interests me is philosophy as the material for an art, at the limit, an art. My idea … is to make art with philosophy, to introduce or make a poetry of thought, not necessarily a poetry made of concepts, a poetry that would put forward some philosophical thesis – but to make something poetic with concepts. Thus, to create a

> practice that could destroy, in a certain way, the classical usage of philosophy (Laruelle and Mackay 2012:29).

After this preamble, I will now examine the core axioms of non-philosophy, necessarily filtered, for our current purposes, through the language of philosophy. What I will show is that "philosophy manages to interpret everything while explaining nothing, because the structure of the explanans, decision, is already presupposed in the explanandum" (Brassier 2003:26).

3.2 A mind drawing itself

> *The Philosophical Decision is an operation of transcendence that believes (in a naïve and hallucinatory way) in the possibility of a unitary discourse of the Real … To philosophize is to decide on the Real and on thought, which ensues from it, that is to philosophize is to believe philosophy is able to align the Real and thought with the universal order of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (the Logos), but also more generally in accordance with the 'total' or unitary order of the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy.* (Laruelle and Collaborators 2013:117)

Although he is trained as a philosopher, Laruelle is remarkably scathing about philosophy, a form of thought that seeks "to assure its own salvation against humans, to make Being and other anonymous entities triumph, to submit humans to the whims of the subject and truth, the world and history" (Tetralogos 2018:46)[74]. Indeed, Laruelle will often claim that philosophy "harasses" living humans, and that philosophical thought, whether within the discipline of philosophy proper or within broader fields like politics, not to mention everyday life, is guilty of a great amount of violence against all of us. Instead, he seeks to 'defetishise' thought (Laruelle 2013c:13) so that instead of humans serving the abstract ends derived by philosophers, thought is made to serve people. In this regard, "[n]on-philosophy attains a rigour that acknowledges the human Real in the only way it can be rightly acknowledged: in person. It directly instantiates a human thought that does not subsume those who think (and those for whom

[74] At time of writing, this book has not been translated into English. The quote I have used here is from the draft translation of one section by Jeremy Smith, available online at: https://endemictheory.wordpress.com/2021/05/30/translation-of-francois-laruelle-what-is-to-be-done-with-philosophy-from-tetralogos-2018/.

they might think) under one or another regime of inhuman determination (through Life, History, Power, Text, God, Being and so on)" (Gangle 2013:3-4). But in what way is thought 'fetishised'? Essentially, this is the philosophical equivalent of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. Roughly speaking, Marx claims that under capitalism we are led to believe that the exchange value of commodities is something inherent to those commodities themselves, as opposed to being related to the social relations – including the labour – that went into producing them. In analogous fashion, Laruelle's argument is that philosophy operates like capitalism in presenting its concepts as exchangeable commodities in a kind of 'marketplace of ideas' where each concept or framework is held to have some inherent traction on the Real – a value that is measured vis-à-vis the Real, whereas in fact there is no intrinsic relation between concepts and reality. To conceive of the relation between philosophy and reality (or the *Real*, *One* or *real-One*, as Laruelle usually terms it) in this manner – thus, of philosophy as "epistemologically sufficient to grasp the Real" (Fardy 2018: 1) – is to baselessly fetishise a specific form of thought. John Mullarkey explains that "[p]hilosophy originates with one fundamental principle: that everything is philosophisable. This is philosophy's narcissism, its philocentrism" (Mullarkey 2006:139). It is precisely this assumption that constitutes the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy. Laruelle offers innumerable formal definitions[75] of this principle, but one of the clearest is in the late work *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*:

> [P]hilosophy is governed by a principle superior to the Principle of Reason, the Principle of Sufficient Philosophisiblity, which is specified according to its diverse goals and activities. It expresses its pretension of absolute autonomy as auto-position/givenness/naming/decision/foundation, etc. It assures and legitimizes its mastery over the sciences and "regional" disciplines. In the end, it articulates the idealist pretension of philosophy as being capable of co-determining the Real by confusing it with Being. The other side of this pretension, the ransom of this sufficiency, is the impossibility of philosophy being a rigorous thinking of itself, non-circular, without begging the question (petitio principii), a theory which is certainly transcendental but of a scientific kind. It is overall concerned with reflection and self-awareness. Philosophy thinks, or feels in the best of cases that it thinks and "is" or "exists" when it thinks.

[75] As will become clear, a form of thinking shorn of its principle of authority *qua* Real is necessarily definitionally open, and its statements provisional, meaning that no single definition is ever conclusive.

> Philosophy gathers itself up within an enlarged cogito in the shape of the World and the cogito is a concentrated philosophy. It is an immanence limited to auto-reflection or auto-affectivity, at best to a fundamental affect. By this, philosophy manifests merely its existence and does not demonstrate that it is the Real to which it makes claim nor does it know itself as this pretension. Its existence contains a hallucination of the Real, which is to say, of the One, "self knowledge" being a maxim of transcendental illusion found in any philosophy (Laruelle 2012a:28).

Philosophy, in short, "possesses a universal cogitative structure" (ibid.:94) whereby it assumes that it can think the Real/One in a manner sufficient to reality, as though reality has a form amenable to this kind of abstract cognitive pursuit[76], but upon closer examination of how philosophy in fact functions, there is something deeply circular and narcissistic to this functioning. In terms of this view, the key operation by which philosophical reasoning takes place is the Philosophical Decision, which is the way in which philosophy *a priori* determines how to divide the real in order to subsequently unite it again as a specific relational structure – that between being and thought, for instance, or between the virtual and actual. The very reason that "[p]hilosophical method will always make a 'circle with its object' " is precisely that it "cannot 'develop, define or describe this precomprehension of Being'" (Mullarkey 2006:151, citing an early untranslated Laruelle text*,* 1971's *Phénomène et différence; essai sur l'ontologie de Ravaisson*). What is being alluded to here may be reminiscent of Russell-style paradoxes of self-reference, like the set of all sets that are not members of themselves, or the famous Liar's Paradox. I touched on some aspects of this paradoxical aspect of self-reference in the previous chapter, but in elaborating upon it, Laruelle does not turn to Deleuze but to the mathematician Kurt Gödel and develops a generalised "non-Gödelian thought" (Laruelle 2013a:63-9) as a way of extricating thinking from its auto-fetishisation.

I will briefly indicate what Gödel achieved with his notorious incompleteness theorem[77]. In the early 20th century, mathematicians like Bertrand Russell and David Hilbert were engaged in attempting to formalise mathematics by seeking out a set of axioms that were both complete

[76] The parallels with Wilfrid Sellars's famous 'myth of the given' are apposite here.
[77] Technically there are two incompleteness theorems, the second of which generalises the first. For our purposes, however, this detail is of no consequence. The interested reader is referred to Douglas Hofstadter's seminal *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (Hofstadter 1979) for an accessible and highly enjoyable explanation of the incompleteness theorems.

and consistent enough to derive all mathematical truth claims from. This work perhaps reached its culmination with the publication of *Principia Mathematica* (Whitehead and Russell 1963) – a monumental work in philosophy of mathematics that sought to be, in a sense, the final word on the subject. It was specifically at this work which Gödel aimed with the publication of *On Formally Undecidable Propositions in Principia Mathematica and Related Systems I* (Gödel 1930), which is a profound dismantling of Russell and Whitehead's claim to have developed a complete axiomatic system that employed an ingenious mathematical equivalent of the Liar's Paradox to demonstrate that both the Principia itself and any possible variants of it were necessarily incomplete, due to the limitations of self-reference within consistent systems.

For Laruelle, the genius of Gödel is not simply that he subverted the absolutist claims of mathematics, installing a profound ungrounding in its very foundations, but also in his discovery of "a new type of scientific quasi-reflexivity, precisely not reflexive in the philosophical sense, or those derived from it" (Laruelle 2013a:67).[78] This form of quasi-reflexivity is what Laruelle terms a 'science-thought' – a different way of thinking premised upon the intrinsic finitude of self-reflection (of the kind at play in paradoxes of self-reference) and which intrinsically "limits the metascientific (or meta-mathematic, structuralist, etc.) type of reflexivity" (ibid.) In other words, it involves systems that try to derive their own validity in a circular or meta-application of their own axioms. Generalising this to what he terms 'non-Gödelianism'[79], Laruelle claims that through the application of this new form of thought one is led out of the endless hall of mirrors of recursive self-reflection and meta-justification towards a rigorous non-philosophical practice. He explains that if "[m]eta-scientific statements are characterized by their project of elucidating the essence of science, but first by their assumed power which is that of a relation of auto-objectifying what they speak about, statement-objects", then this always "concerns philosophical transcendence: the correlation of the meta of meta-physics and the object objectified by it" (Laruelle 2013:65). Furthermore, this mode of correlation, because it involves some or other kind of separation of thought and content, creates, whether in mathematics or philosophy, what Laruelle calls "epistemo-logical distance", which he defines as "the formal trait of 'meta' or of objectification through which these

[78] "[W]hat Gödel condemned was the claim of metascience, the philosophical type of grounding of the sciences. What he himself really practiced alongside this "condemnation" of any philosophy-of-science, philosophy-in-science and epistemology was the science of metascience, an effective science no longer using these metascientific formations other than with a view to describing the essence of science" (Laruelle 2013a:68).
[79] To reiterate, when reading the *non-* in Laruelle's work, it should always be read as *non-standard*.

statements articulate with the language-object and give it a spontaneous philosophical interpretation" (ibid.). The hyphenated separation of episteme (knowledge) and logos (reason) is an example of the radically performative nature of non-philosophy and draws attention through its syntax to the way in which what we usually conceive of as a single term – epistemology, or theory of knowledge – is in fact a tacitly self-justificatory or auto-reifying act that involves the reciprocal presupposition of systems of knowledge and reasoning about them. In case this is unclear, Laruelle asks us to consider the 'onto-photo-logical' essence of philosophy, i.e., how philosophy functions very much like a photographic structure[80]. Jonathan Fardy observes:

> From Plato's cave, to rationalism's "light of Reason," to the Enlightenment, up to the rhetoric of reflectivity in the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, or Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the visible—light, as we know, has had a long life in philosophical and theoretical thought. Indeed, the etymological roots of "theory" leads back to an entire ancient Greek rhetoric of seeing, speculating, and knowing. This "onto-photo-logical" essence of philosophy is jettisoned in non-photographic thought (Fardy 2018:14).

There is, in this onto-photo-logical view, an originary 'flash' of reason that illuminates the world, but "[p]hilosophy's effort to capture the 'originary flash' is illusory for it was always already a 'trick' set up in advance to authorize philosophy as the power to illuminate the truth and to fashion the world in its image of thought" (ibid.:15). Laruelle points out that in terms of this view, philosophy is "destined ceaselessly to take new shots of that first flash – consigned to extinction– constrained thus to comment interminably on that first shot by taking yet more, to engage himself in an unlimited becoming-photographic – so as to verify that the flash, the World, the flash of the World – that is to say, philosophy– really has taken place, and was not just a trick" (Laruelle 2012b:3). In case this trick is not yet evident, consider precisely what it means within this photographic frame for the flash of reason to try to capture the flash of reason. In short, "the Philosophical Decision only discovers, Laruelle claims, that which it has already decided upon. The flash of discovery disguises the moment of decision" (Fardy 2018:16-

[80] This is not a metaphor – for Laruelle, to employ 'regional materials' like photography to reflect on philosophy merely reproduces philosophy's dominance; instead, he will talk of a 'unified science of philosophy and photography', where each practice thinks in its own way while being equal, in the final instance, in being unilaterally determined by the Real (we will explore this idea of unilateral determination below).

17). Laruelle avers that if light "is the constitutive metaphor of the Philosophical Decision, how could it then be thought by philosophy without a vicious circle resulting?" (Laruelle 2012b:3). Plainly put,

> [P]hilosophy projects a reality in itself, which is to say, one that has been constructed in the realm of operational transcendence, within which it claims to intervene, and in terms of which it gauges all possible intervention. But the real content of philosophy, once the illusion of the in-itself has been bracketed, is this very correlation between itself and the world (Laruelle 2003).

Whether understood within a non-Gödelian, non-photographic or non-philosophical register, what is being observed is the way in which thinking of the reflective or distancing or predicative type is constitutively circular and is premised upon a decision *qua* reflection, distance or predication that is essentially arbitrary *qua* the Real. Summarising, Smith and Mullarkey helpfully draw attention to the etymology of decision, reminding us that "[t]o 'decide' is to cut oneself off from the Real, to represent it – decaedere (de- 'off' + caedere 'cut'). To represent, to cut off, to de-cide" (Smith and Mullarkey 2012:7). This very cutting, however, means that "[t]he radical immanence of the One cannot be grasped through philosophy, since its inaugural decision requires the splitting of the ultimate unity of its object in order to secure the legitimacy of its access to that object" (Olson 2012:177). The similarities here with Deleuze's account of the thought of individuation being the individuation of thought are striking: the object of thought is thought itself in its become – it cannot 'catch itself from behind' without slipping into an infinite regress of tenuous metaphysical claims.

This leads to the question, however, of whether the Philosophical Decision – this manoeuvre whereby thought first instantiates a cut in the Real in thinking it and then seeks to repair this cut with a synthesised unity that is then projected back onto the Real – really is an invariant structure of philosophy. In order to tentatively answer this, I will examine the decisional structure in more detail. Laruelle often refers to the decision as involving a kind of 'mixing' of, for instance, transcendence and immanence[81]. From an originary radical immanence, a split is first made as a foundational act of thinking – a split between Being and Thinking (Parmenides)

[81] Or difference and identity, Self and Other, factum and datum.

for instance, or between noumenon and phenomenon (Kant), or epistemes and subjectivity (Foucault). Then these terms are joined together again in a synthesis of the transcendent, the transcendental and the immanent where the relations between conditions and conditioned resemble nothing other than the syntactical structure of the foundational split[82]. Ian James explains:

> The transcendence of concepts operate, as it were, instrumentally as a means by which the transcendence/immanence divide (or 'dyad') can be posed as such and then synthesized into a greater unity. Put differently, philosophy poses 'being' or existence on the one hand and its representation in concepts or categories on the other, and it then constructs, or legislates for, the equivalence, identity or unity of these in the universality of philosophical truths and foundations. Philosophy thus positions itself as the unifying transcendent principle which governs the original division or opposition. In this way, it also founds its own authority … at the very same moment that it founds the 'truth' of being and existence (James 2012:164).

Through this structure, Laruelle (2013a:4) observes, philosophy "claims to determine itself beyond all its empirical determinations which it only calculates in order to prescribe it in an auto-position in which it is titular, an auto-comprehension or auto-legislation, auto-naming, etc." If, for Parmenides, "the Same is Being and Thinking … [then] thought can simultaneously be a term opposed to Being and the superior synthetic form of their opposition" (Laruelle and Collaborators 2013:136).[83] The Philosophical Decision is, then, structurally defined as a tautological practice of thought that "includes a dyad (the correlation of two terms) and a unity of synthesis, an immanent and transcendent One according to the various proportions of the dyad" (Laruelle 2013a:85).[84] Laruelle will usually refer to this invariant quality as the

[82] Rocco Gangle reminds us of the similarities of this dynamic with mathematician George Spencer-Brown's discussion of 're-entry of the form' in the latter's *Laws of Form* (Gangle 2013:55).
[83] More concretely, "[t]he relations between thought and the real are given by the Parmenidean matrix "The Same is Being and Thinking." Thought and Being are in a relation of reciprocal influence. Their identity can thus take several forms: from the supposed adequate correspondence of perception and object up to the identity of self-consciousness and consciousness of the object; of subjective "reflection" and objective reflection, dialectical identity of the real and the rational, but always by respecting this cor-respondence. Broken in the form of a (cor-)respondence of a hearkening-response to Being (Heidegger), or of a difference, of a thought-with-the-trace (Derrida), this adequation subsists as one of the major presuppositions – one of the halves – of deconstructions and one of the most obvious criteria of the philosophical style" (Laruelle and Collaborators 2013:143).
[84] Think, for instance, of the dyad of Being and beings and its synthesis as Dasein as their mixed unity.

amphibological 2/3 structure or 'matrix' of philosophy[85], where an initial dyad is mixed with its post-hoc 're-unification' in order to produce "a 'Thought World' in its own self-image" (Dubilet 2017:31).

If it were a matter of simply some kind of error of thinking that it would be possible to eliminate within philosophy, then Laruelle's project would serve no real purpose. However, Laruelle views it as necessarily presupposed by philosophical thought. It is thus "not a simple syntactic trait whose effects it would be possible to limit: it is identically the claim of philosophy to be able to co-determine the Real in this way" (Laruelle 2013a:4). If this is the case, and if the Philosophical Decision, along with the Principle of Sufficiency it appeals to, "enacts the violent alienation of the real from itself" (James 2019:30) and thus, by extension, tend towards a violence towards life as that Real, then what we instead require, lest we continue begging the question, is

> a thought adequate to the Real – a type of experience or of Real which escapes auto-positioning, which is not a circle of the Real and thought, a One which does not unify but which remains in-One, a Real which is immanent (to) itself rather than to a form of thought, to a 'logic', etc., or which is given without-position and without-givenness in order to refuse philosophy its principal pretension and to be entitled to say that it does not reach the Real, even if necessarily maintaining certain relations with it (Laruelle 2013a:5).

This is a profoundly difficult idea to grasp, which is perhaps why Laruelle is so repetitive. He needs to demonstrate over and over again (both in what he is saying and how he is saying it) this strange new way of thinking that does not involve making a decision on the Real, but instead *thinking from the Real* without entering into any relationship of reciprocal determination, exchange or similar between the Real and thought, but instead a non-relation of unilateral determination in the last instance. This is not a *syntax*, but a *uni-tax*.

[85] "We have said that Philosophical Decision is a matrix not in 2 terms nor 3 terms but in 2/3 terms; the 2 of the Dyad and the 3rd of the One (Unity of synthesis or of system); but the 3rd is divided or intervenes 2 times: it is identical to one of the terms of the dyad and distinct from it and from the Dyad. As such 2/3 or even 3/4 terms, the fractional if not fractal character of the dimensions of Philosophical Decision indicating that every term is divided here and here intervenes twice" (Laruelle 2013a:44).

As it stands, we have been confronted with a barrage of unusual new terms, strung together in syntactically provocative ways. I will now turn to an examination of the details of Laruelle's non-philosophical practice. To begin, I will examine the radical immanence in which he situates both thought and Real, after which I will turn to the core axioms of non-philosophy involving the One; thought's unilateral determination by the One and the idea of the Vision-in-One; or force-(of)-thought, which provides the operational framework for this strange thought. The guiding question throughout (which already suggests the political valence of non-standard ways of thinking) will be "[h]ow can we think … without entering into or affirming a system that is premised on the ideology that the Real can be exchanged for its equivalent in concepts like the way bread and money are made seemingly fungible in market life?" (Fardy 2021:195).

3.3 Thinking a Stranger-thought … for the human-in-person

> *When all is said and done, is non-philosophy anything other than the chance for an effective utopia?* (Laruelle 2004)

Laruelle occasionally reduces non-philosophy to three central axioms. As a heuristic for what is to follow, it is worth keeping these in mind: "1. the Real is radically immanent; 2. its causality is unilaterality or Determination-in-the-last-instance; 3. the object of this causality is the Thought-world, or more precisely, philosophy complicated by experience" (Laruelle 2012a:45). Laruelle both begins with, and remains in, immanence. Like Deleuze and numerous other 20th century philosophers, Laruelle is committed to the idea that immanence is all there is and that all thinking, being and so forth is situated immanently. There is no transcendent realm beyond this reality of the type characteristic of Platonic idealism or conventional forms of monotheistic religion. However, Laruelle pushes this idea further than his contemporaries – even further than Michel Henry, whose attempt to think a phenomenology of pure unmediated immanence is a major influence on him. He argues that any thinking that separates itself from immanence – in the manner of the dyads described above – in fact already imposes a form of quasi-transcendence onto immanence[86]. Instead, we need to think not *of* immanence, but *from*

[86] As he argues, "[a]ll the procedures of reduction of transcendence to immanence remain philosophical operations of division and in the end are reversible, such that immanence is not a "real presupposed," i.e. given-

immanence, in a way that does not separate thought and its belonging to immanence. This first axiom goes a long way towards explaining Laruelle's awkward syntax – if we want to describe thinking in a way that does not make a cut in the Real – that is, radical immanence – then we need to exemplify the form of that thinking in language itself; hence the endless hyphenation and bracketing of linguistic elements usually used to connote distance and separation ('of', 'in', etc.). In other words, what Laruelle is attempting to do through this performative writing style, is "to think immanence immanently without reifying immanence into a form of crypto-transcendence" (Fardy 2018:vi). He is entirely unwavering on this front and seeks to push beyond Spinozists like Deleuze in arguing that "[r]adical immanence amounts to more than a 'transcendental fact': more than a fact, it is the given (in) itself before every transcendental givenness; more than transcendental: it is the Real which 'precedes' every description of itself or every usage of transcendence" (Laruelle 2013a:26).[87] Laruelle then confounds this account, however, by claiming that "[t]ranscendental immanence is the real cause of transcendence" (Laruelle 2013b:71), which suggests that he does still think about the Real using the usual philosophical tropes of immanence, transcendence and the transcendental. However, what Laruelle is claiming is in fact profoundly novel[88]: instead of immanence being affected by transcendence, as in Platonic-style accounts, transcendence is in fact a local expression[89] of immanence, and it is – in final reckoning – immanence that provides the transcendental conditions of thought, being and so forth, which *themselves* are said local expression. Fardy (2018:6) argues in this regard that "[t]he One is a realist discourse written in the syntax of transcendence". To clarify, "[t]ranscendence is 'in' immanence and always conditioned by it but can never affect or alter immanence in return" (James 2012:170). This is a confusing thought, and in many ways Laruelle's usage of traditional philosophical terminology constrains his ability to convey it, which is why in more recent work he has moved away from using the terms

before-any-presupposition or supposed-without-position, i.e. without-transcendence" (Laruelle and Collaborators 2013:125).

[87] Whether Laruelle's characterisation of Deleuze (Laruelle 2010) as in fact guilty of rendering immanence a 'transcendental fact' is valid given Deleuze's own rigorous grappling with this issue in his late work (Deleuze 2001) is the subject of highly technical debates that far exceed the scope of this synoptic overview. For our current purposes, we can simply assume that Laruelle is correct when he observes that to say that "the real lays claim to a primacy-and-priority implies that it be inscribed in the element of transcendence and exteriority (immanence being one of its secondary properties, even in the so-called 'philosophies of immanence': Spinoza, Nietzsche, Deleuze), and that it be reciprocally determined – approximate with an operation, a negation, a difference, etc.– with thought. The philosophical real is at best repressed because it is a desired real, cloven by transcendence" (Laruelle and Collaborators 2013:126).

[88] We should, however, temper this novelty with the knowledge that Simondon develops a proto-account along much the same lines roughly half a century earlier (Simondon 2020).

[89] This term is used provisionally, for reasons that will be explained below.

'transcendental' and, to some extent, 'transcendent', and now refers to the 'immanental' as the radical immanence that gives rise to local expressions of itself – or transcendental functions of itself (Laruelle 2004) – without alienating itself from itself. Laruelle explains:

> It is not a thought of immanence – yet another philosophical decision that would objectify the latter, that would posit supposed radical immanence by means of transcendence, which is generally the case. A thought is itself effectively immanent … when it operates according-to-immanence … Radical immanence itself stops being just an- other slogan in the philosophical tradition (the slogan as the other face of destiny, dispatch or calling) when it is no longer posited by philosophical or constitutive operations but by solely axiomatic operations, when it forms the object of axiomatic (transcendental) decisions instead of theses (Laruelle and Collaborators 2013:125).

Thought is therefore determined (in the last instance, as Laruelle will say, invoking Engels's old idea of the determination in the last instance of the economy that was popularised by Althusser) by radical immanence and remains in immanence. Whatever local transcendences we encounter in the world or within phenomenal experience, are caused by immanence and *are* immanence. This radical immanence that expresses itself without self-alienation is, as should be clear by now, simply another word for the Real or the One (although "[e]ven 'immanence' merely serves to name the Real which tolerates nothing but axiomatic descriptions or formulations" (ibid.:126)). Via the grounding axiom of non-philosophy[90], the One is also constitutively closed to thought – if it were not, we would be back to the logic of the Philosophical Decision and its Principle of Sufficiency. Thus, the second core axiom is reached: the causality of the One/Real is unilateral and determining of thought (including philosophy) in the last instance without thought determining the One. This is something Laruelle often describes as 'unilateral duality'. In other words, the One is "held to be determinative for the possibility of philosophy – and even its pseudo-decisionist dynamic – but it is not a 'oneness' that philosophical material relates to because it is part of the Real in the last instance, even though this 'last instance' never arrives as a subject for philosophical reason" (Fardy 2021:3). Summarising his complex account of the One, Laruelle asserts that:

[90] "[T]he grounding axiom of non-philosophy [is] that the One or the Real is foreclosed to thought and that this is of its own accord rather than owing to a failure of thought" (Laruelle 2013a:xxii). It is important to note in this regard that "[t]he Real is neither capable of being known or even 'thought' but can be described in axioms" (Laruelle and Collaborators 2013:125).

> The One through immanence distinguishes itself as much from the transcendent One as from the transcendental One: on the condition that it is radical immanence, without the smallest fragment of transcendence within it, of exteriority, of scission, of negativity, or of nothingness. We call this One-in-One rather than One-in-Being or as-Being; One which is real as One rather than as it is or would be (Laruelle 2013a:5).[91]

This One is, as we have seen, not given to thought, but it is the given-without-givenness that conditions thought in the final instance. However, while thought cannot know the One through the logic of the cut and thus cannot take any kind of external view of, or position on it, it does have an immanent 'non-thetic' knowing of this structure of immanent self-expression/determination that Laruelle terms the *Vision-in-One*, or *force-(of)-thought*[92], and which constitutes a kind of first moment of thought prior to reflexivity[93]. According to this view, philosophy is for Laruelle (2004) "already-given in-One", and the "[v]ision-in-One is a radically unreflected experience-(of)-itself, not even an 'auto-affection' but the Affected-before-all-affection" (Laruelle 2013a:56). Great care is needed here, however. Until this point I have been using terms like 'expression' to explain the unilateral determination of thought by immanence, but in fact for Laruelle any form of causality of this kind surreptitiously transcendentalises the One and performs a Philosophical Decision (Spinoza's expression of substance through the attributes, for instance, relies on this eminently *philosophical* move). This requires the exclusion of "metaphysical causalities" that operate "through alienation and identification to self and to Other (expression, procession, emanation, action-reaction, projection, etc.)" and thus "eliminate formalism and idealism, materialism, teleology and technologism" (ibid.:122). In this regard it may seem as though Laruelle is operating with a privative conception of the One as a kind of radical alterity. However, lest we cut again, it must be axiologically assumed that the One is not simply "a negation, lack or an abyss of ground, but rather a positivity of content. The

[91] As he elaborates, "[i]n comparison to the transcendentals of ontology and mysticism, the One taken up by non-philosophy is neither transcendent nor transcendental; it is only immanent or real, immanent through-and-through; an immanence (to) itself rather than just to itself; rather than to Being, to the Ego, to Life, to Substance, etc. This is its action or its causality called 'transcendental'. Furthermore, this transcendental trait roots itself, through cloning as we will say, in real immanence on the occasion of transcendent entities, instead of grafting itself over them in the manner of philosophy's "transcendentals" (Laruelle 2013a:22).

[92] These are not entirely overlapping terms in Laruelle, but in this brief account we can view them interchangeably.

[93] "The non-philosophical practice of philosophy reposes on a single theorem: The One, understood as vision-in-One or as transcendental experience non-thetic (of) self, is what determines philosophical decision in the last instance as non-philosophy or in view of it" (Laruelle 2012b:79).

One is One in and of itself prior to, and independently of, any conceptual operations of division, negation and so on" (James 2012:162). As a corollary to this, it must also be kept in mind that "[t]he conception of the One Laruelle is putting forth is not at all an Absoluteness of the Same, but instead a way of thinking identity which is radically immanent to itself, without any recourse to transcendental attributes to overdetermine this radical identity" (Smith 2014:7). Another name for the One is, again, simply the human-in-human – the One, then, is not some all-encompassing metaphysical object, although it "allows for a truly unlimited proliferation of givens and modes of givenness" (Gangle 2013:162), but simply the radical immanence of lived life prior to the transcendence of thought it conditions in the last instance. In other words, the One is profoundly humble. It is clear then how the three axioms (the Real/One/human-in-human is radically immanent; has a non-relation of unilateral duality with thought; and determines thought, including philosophy, in the final instance) give rise to the positive side of the non-philosophical project as a new practice of thought. Laruelle makes a straightforward proposition in this regard:

> [C]an we finally think the One "itself," as independent from Being and the Other, in-convertible with them, non-determinable by thought and language (hence, foreclosed to the Logos)? To this contradictory and at the very least paradoxical question, we must reply by inversion - to think according to the One rather than thinking the One as a final object or a close relative of Being, but to think this non-relation to thought with the traditional means of thinking. To separate the non-relation more so than to displace it vis-a-vis philosophy with the material help of philosophy itself, but without forming a circle with it, thus positing the non-relation as the Real or the One-in-One that itself determines this help. Thus, in order to escape its authority and its sufficiency, to unmask its transcendental appearance, but also, from then on, to transform it according to the One-in-One, such are the terms of the new problem (Laruelle 2012a:28).

To think in non-standard ways then (and there are of necessity infinite potential forms of this thought, not just Laruelle's) is to think *from* the One instead of attempting to think the One (a necessarily *philosophical* move). In other words, it is "simply not to play the philosophical game at all, not to suspend some decision in favor of another, but to be indifferent to every form of the decision" (Smith 2016:17). This is precisely the democracy-(of)-thought: all thoughts are, in the final instance, equal *qua* the Real, being unilaterally conditioned by it. The One is radically

autonomous vis-à-vis thought but thought itself enjoys an at least relative autonomy when it is no longer premised upon the logic of exchange that has conditioned philosophy. If "[t]he Real enters into no relation and thus no exchange with any thought", then "[n]on-philosophy is ontologically non-capitalist" (Fardy 2020:96).[94] In this radically human view (albeit a human-without-human*ism* or any other *decision* taken on life-as-lived), the vision-in-One is not some profound mystical experience with weighty metaphysical baggage. On the contrary, "[i]t is how we human beings see if and when we acknowledge honestly that we are real and yet no longer bolster that acknowledgement with any foundation, ground or authority: World, Logic, History, Power, Matter, Reality, Self, Truth, Philosophy, God, One" (Gangle 2013:179).

This shift in register, from the austere climes of the One as some foreclosed radical immanence to the lived ordinary human, allows us in turn to understand the ethico-political import of Laruelle's project. It may still seem that, in being conditioned by the One, and unilaterally so, thought is in fact radically impoverished and alienated from its usual scope of application *qua* the Real. If this Real, however, is simply the human-in-human, then non-philosophy is in fact an intervention into the alienation conducted by philosophical thought – the violent cuts with which it rends life as lived, or as it could be lived. To think non-philosophically is to think with the force-(of)-thought, to think a defetishised, non-exchangist thought that 'clones'[95] the Real by thinking "itself in a manner that is ultimately in-One in-the-last-instance, and not through idealist auto-position of itself, therefore assumed real by abstraction" (Laruelle 2013a:27). This new continent of 'flat thoughts' (Laruelle 2012:29-31) is perhaps, like a Deleuzian multiplicity, a land of n-1 dimensions where there is nothing 'outside' or 'beyond' or 'transcending' us. In this new terrain, where we encounter both ourselves and each other as strangers[96], "[m]an-in-person is the condition under which philosophy and its ethics are placed" (Laruelle 2015:xvii).

[94] Remember, "[c]apitalism operates on the metaphysical premise that all qualitative differences can be converted into differences of quantity. Exchange means giving something and getting something of equal "value," but in a different form. Likewise, standard philosophy is premised on the idealized vision that any aspect of the Real (or the Real itself) can be exchanged for a concept adequate or equal to it" (Fardy 2021:77).

[95] "What the concept is to standard philosophy, the clone is to non-philosophy. Whereas the philosophical concept decides on its object, the non-philosophical clone parallels it. Just as the clones of biotechnology parallel their progenitors, so the clones of non-philosophy parallel the Real" (Fardy 2018:9).

[96] "In their complete notion, men or humans are existing-Stranger-subjects determined-in-the-last-instance by the Real or the One as Ego-in-Ego. Contrary to the philosophical Ego, man-Ego is foreclosed to subjects, but the latter, insofar as they presuppose the former, effectuate man-Ego's uni-versality for the World" (Laruelle and Collaborators 2013:78).

Non-standard philosophy is a philosophy for the human-in-human as lived "before the philosophical projection of the World" (Fardy 2020:18). *Human-in-human* – what is this strange syntactic construction we have used throughout? Could we not just refer to 'humanity' or some other more conventional term instead? Certainly, it connotes the same thing. However, is not 'humanity' a term that exists after the cut? Indeed, for Laruelle it is simply the case that "[t]he human of humanism, anti-humanism, or post-humanism is the human violated and victimized by philosophical abstraction" (Fardy 2018:21). To practice non-philosophy in the world in which we find ourselves – on that is unilaterally determined by the Real – instead entails countenancing this victim-in-Person; not as the face of the Other, but as a vision-in-One that gives rise not to a thought of democracy, but to a democracy-(of)-thought. Philosophy has created victims throughout its history – the victims of ideologies of all kinds, and the victims reproduced through a victimological distance that assumes a Principle of Sufficiency and that decides on the Real for others. Non-philosophy then, in final reckoning, is simply the rigorous practice of a thought that refuses to be victimised any longer:

> As a philosophical concept, man is a humanoid traced from the dyad of the anthropoid, which has hardly gone beyond Greek anthropological thought, and of the Judeo-Christian 'creature.' Philosophy has aligned this concept with the Cosmos, Physis, Being, Spirit, Will to Power, etc. each as abstract and puppet entities that imply the dismemberment of man into the attributes (power, language, sex, society, politics, etc.) with which it has attempted to artificially recompose him. The pro-thetic, anti-thetic, synthetic (artificial) man of philosophy (and not simply that of anthropology or the human sciences to which world-thought assigns its dirty work) is this 'sublime abortion' that ought to give birth to the 'overman.' Philosophy wants the inhuman, the prehuman, the all-too-human and the over-human without recognizing the 'ordinary' nothing-but-human (Laruelle and Collaborators 2013:78).

4. Conclusion

> *One day, after I had completed my studies, I sat at my desk, and I cleared away all the books, everything that had already been written. I started again with a new blank sheet of paper, and I began to search myself.* (Laruelle 2012:1)

4.1 To wander in our wondering

We have followed Foucault, Deleuze and Laruelle far down a winding path, occasionally getting lost in dense conceptual thickets, and not always entirely sure of where we are being led. Indeed, there can be, given the deeply anti-teleological nature of the respective philosophies of these thinkers, no real destination, only a path that is made by walking. Along the way, we have encountered three profound delimitations of thought. With Foucault, we saw not only that thinking is conditioned by the complex exigencies of epistemes, but also that we are beings of radical finitude, always grappling with the messy relations between our appeals to the transcendental foundations of knowledge and the origins of those foundations in the empirical practice of that same knowledge. Thinking from the shoreline, a liminal thought without grounds or origins, at which thought continually encounters the unthought that dwells within it, we saw the figure of Man[97] slowly wash away, and with it our certainty in the relations between our thought and the world it seeks to circumscribe. Walking further with Deleuze, across unfamiliar terrain, it seemed at times as though even the contingencies of time and place, the contextually bounded nature of the visible and the sayable, were themselves merely the fleeting, provisional results of a coming-to-be of thought and the world where everything was caught up in a dance of reciprocal becoming, phases of metastable distributions of difference anterior to time and space, identity and reality, subject and object, at least as we usually understand these things. Attempting at least to produce some knowledge of this dance, we were confronted with the myriad ways in which thinking can go wrong and were disabused of the dogmatic image of thought that had led us not just into error, but madness and stupidity too, causing us to erect our tents of good and common sense on the shifting pre-individual

[97] Sexism notwithstanding, it is important to note that both Foucault and Laruelle use the term 'Man' consciously and provocatively; in Foucault's case to describe the episteme associated with the Enlightenment, humanism and so forth, and in Laruelle's case as a generic placeholder for that which is foreclosed to thought (the human-in-human).

sands of sense's other. Ungrounded, we invoked truth, reason and the ends of knowledge, but we soon saw how these were phantoms of our own making and the refusal of a radical practice of learning. Throwing the dice, we finally understood what it was to bind all of chance in every throw, to welcome the eternal return of difference, to wander further down the path forged by our wandering. Then it became dark, and we could not see even a foot in front of us. In universe black (Laruelle and Mackay 2012:401-8)[98] Laruelle showed us how to walk without illumination. Without any view of where we were going we had to rely on other, less-practiced senses, but we soon learned that these could be more powerful than sight – the sound of distant birds, the direction of the wind, these guided us without sufficiency, without a map. Stopping for a while, our fellow travellers reminded us, in case we had forgotten, that we were walking for our own purposes, not for the sake of the path, and that not all who wander are lost, but that to find a new city we may have to lose sight of the old roads. And we rested a little more, and then we began walking again, with a strangely different gait.

4.2 Three become One become a thousand

In this dissertation, I have sought to examine what it is we do when we do philosophy, and have ended up trying to catch sight of myself in the act of thinking, to touch my left hand to my left elbow, to clap with one hand. It is perhaps due to this circular, endlessly recursive nature of thought in its attempts to de-cide, to cut the radical immanence and make itself its other, only to stitch it back up again with the rough thread of conceptual hubris, that I have chosen Foucault, Deleuze and Laruelle as my three subjects. All of them are keenly interested in that slippery, liminal moment of thought thinking thought. I could of course justify my choice in infinite other ways, but all of them would be insufficient, all of them would reflect simply one phase of thought, and all of them are bound up in the intricacies of the diagrams of power-knowledge that define the thinkable. For now it suffices to recognise that my choice was not just scholastic or pedagogical, but deeply ethico-political. My three fellow travellers are all philosophers who have come face to face with the violence inflicted by unthinking thought, whether it be in the academy, the halls of power or the most mundane of encounters between

[98] "We believe that reality is horizon and light, aperture and flash, whereas it resembles more the stance of an opaque non-relationship (to) light. At the very moment we explore the uni-versal dimension of the cosmic, we remain prisoners of cosmo-logical difference. Our philosophers are children who are afraid of the Dark" (Laruelle and Mackay 2012:406-7).

living beings. Nietzscheans have sought to respond not with ressentiment – with the sad passions of ideologues, dogmatists and powermongers – but instead with the creation of a new Earth, to be inhabited by a people to come who no longer labour under the shadow of Man.

The analytic of finitude already calls us, and perhaps has since the time of Kant, to move beyond the cartoon figures we have drawn in the sand, just as Deleuze summons us to liberate the creation of concepts from the strictures of the dogmatic image and Laruelle sets fire to the parliament of Sufficiency and Decision as a first incendiary act of democracy-(in)-thought. We could have chosen otherwise, taken a different path, thrown the dice at another table. There is another journey to be taken with Badiou, Serres and Meillassoux, and another with Stengers, Latour and Braidotti. We could have interrogated the myth of the given with Sellars, Brandom and Brassier, or built a brain with Kant, Hegel and Negarestani. To mark Foucault, Deleuze and Laruelle out as of somehow central importance to our project is arbitrary, given how many other thinkers, philosophers or not, have grappled with our core question in profoundly novel ways. To appeal to any final grounds to justify or condemn this de-cision, however, would be profoundly at odds with what we have discovered about the strange loops of thinking.

Our choice, like all thought, was one conditioned by contingency, phased into being, a cut in the Real. What is important, although of course the grounds of that importance recede endlessly towards the horizon, is that we chose to think anew, without knowing quite where that thought would lead us. This way, for some, lies the very worst form of relativist indulgence. But if the space of reasons in which we think and play is a space formed by our action, forming us as we form it, then the evisceration of truths and grounds and all the old certainties is not a vapid 'anything goes' call to indulge the very worst beliefs but its stark opposite. Confronted with any dogma that would defend itself with a disingenuous appeal to relativism, we can confront it not with another dogma but instead with its own contingency, with its provisional nature as a single phase of a metastability that is rich with pre-individual charge and could become otherwise, and with the tenuously tautological manner in which it has sought to render itself sufficient to decide upon the Real. If relativism lies this way, then it is the relativism of a rigorous thought without image, finally liberated from the figures of Man and Reason and Humanity – a thought instead of the human-in-human. A thought that is the minimal condition of a thinking called *philosophy*.

4.3 Coda: make a mark

Halfway through his book *Om: Creative Meditations*, Zen Buddhist psychedelics advocate and theologian Alan Watts (an unlikely name, perhaps to invoke at this point in our long journey), reflects on the work of his friend, mathematician-philosopher George Spencer-Brown who, in the strange little book *Laws of Form* (Spencer-Brown 1969)*,* explores the radical implications of choosing to act, of making a mark (⌝) in order to divide the undivided and then follow the consequences. It is a book that starts with an injunction, and proceeds, in E-Prime[99], to unfold a wild becoming of all of mathematics and beyond, and then finally turns around and asks us, 'why?'

> Brown begins with the instruction to the reader to draw a distinction, any distinction you want, between something and nothing, between the inside and the outside, what have you. Then he leads you through a process of reasoning where he shows you that, once you have made that step, all the laws of mathematics, physics, biology, and electronics follow inexorably. He draws them out. He gets you into immensely complicated electronic circuitry systems that necessarily follow from your having drawn a distinction. Once you have done that, the universe as we know it is inevitable. Afterwards he says that he has not told you anything you did not know already. At every step, when you saw that one of his proofs (his theorems) was correct, you said 'Oh, of course', because you knew it already. Then at the end of it, where he has shown you, as it were, the nature of your own mind, he raises the question 'was this trip really necessary?' So now he takes us on a re-entry and says 'you see what has happened through all this mathematical process, and also in the course of your complicated lives, where you have been trying to find something. The universe has taken one turn' (Watts 1980:81-1).

For our three philosophers too, there is an injunctive aspect to thought. Indeed, in their later work all of them develop an approach to philosophical practice that is premised upon open experimentation as opposed to the endless elaboration of an *a priori* circumscribed domain of

[99] E-Prime, developed by the semioticians David Bourland and Alfred Korzybski, is a form of writing and speaking that attempts to minimise dogma and certainty in communication by removing totalising claims and apodictic statements through, for example, the elimination of all forms of the verb *to be*. Laws of Form is written entirely in E-Prime.

thought. For Foucault this is borne out in his ethical project of the care of the self, while we have seen that for Deleuze it is reflected in the throw of the dice and the willing of the eternal return of difference in the free creation of concepts. In Laruelle, the making of a mark, the ℸ or force-(of)-thought that divides the undivided that remains undivided, is evident in his recent practice of philo-fiction: the bringing together of various domains like philosophy and photography in a 'concept collider' or 'matrix', as though thought itself could operate like the particle colliders used by physicists. It is due to this focus on experimentation without grounds – or with Gödelian grounds that are recursively and provisionally co-imbricated with what they simultaneously ground and threaten to unground – that we have been less interested in embroiling our three philosophers in a tortuous debate filled with ressentiment than in the positive creative project of thinking anew. While we could have brought each thinker into critical dialogue with the others, situating Laruelle squarely within a single phase of thought, tempering Foucault's analytic of finitude by situating it within his own empirico-transcendental doublet or de-cision, or challenging Deleuze to account for the episteme within which the thought of the individuation of thought is possible, this critical task, when shorn of its Principle of Sufficiency, represents little more than the marking of territory, and it has been, throughout, a deeper form of marking we sought to draw attention to. To think is to make a mark or to be marked. Following the injunction and making a mark, and then another, and then another, let us finally open ourselves to the shock and becoming of a thought without grounds.

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