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FROM THE PHENOMENA TO THE EVENT.
THE ANAMORPHOSIS OF THE EVENT

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Abstract

Assuming that the phenomenon is something different from the event, this essay proposes a phenomenological description of the phenomenon's road until the status of event is reached. Using the anamorphosis in a methodological way, this itinerary consists of three steps. Following the phenomenological concept of phenomenon, borrowed from Heidegger and Husserl's writings, the first step of this detachment unveils the *con-tingence*, grasped in Jean-Luc Marion's manner, as "what affects me". The following step is the isolation of the facticity of the *incident* of any other innerworldly occurrence. Finally, the identification and description of three main features of the event constitutes the most radical anamorphosis, that of the separation of the *event* itself from the factically lived incident. The preoccupation to rename the metaphysical and commonly, daily meanings of the event accompanies this whole approach.

Keywords: event, phenomenology, anamorphosis, phenomenality, con-tingency, incident, facticity, Husserl, Heidegger, Marion.

I. Introduction

Are we still allowed to speak about one "singular" philosophy, *that* philosophy which unifies diversity in an unique thought, an unique idea or a theme of highest generality, which gives at the same time meaning to the motivational whole from where it came?

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In the event we consent to generalize without a preliminary “sociology” of contemporary philosophical preferences, that one may indicate another “pathmark” on the road of thinking: the *event*. The multitude of preoccupations of different areas of culture² attest the event to be probably the last historical recognisable universal philosophy. Also, the desire for novelty which rules the understanding and the transmission of daily events, in a journalistic fashion³, increases the importance of the task of thinking the event.

However, it is quite clear that we cannot claim to provide an exhaustive explanation of a concept of event obtained after synthesizing a material suffocating through vastness and also confusing due to the imprecision of the discourse and theme. Perhaps it is only the brilliance that can direct the “seeker” of the event on his own road, clearing the obstacles and preventing the slippage in digressions and divagations which, unfortunately, are too often seen in almost all cultural milieus.

Without stating the ambiguous notions in which the event is frequently discussed, the synthesis of what is common to all its determinations seems to be an useless method. However, if such an approach is possible, it would involve the knowledge of a large interdisciplinary field. To enumerate only a few applications in which the event, this proteic notion, takes part, we shall start with its

² Since the vastness of the problematic dedicated to the event, I confine myself to mentioning only two methodologic ways, as they have been named in Marlène Zarader’s paper (“The Event between Phenomenology and History”, 2005): (a) as a phenomenological concept, the event became a favourite theme of French Phenomenology. Following the footsteps of M. Heidegger, H.-G. Gadamer and M. Merleau-Ponty, this paradigm became crucial in French Philosophy starting with the ‘80s, together with the research of Jean-Luc Marion, Françoise Dastur, Jocelyn Benoist and Claude Romano. This essay refers mostly to this tradition; (b) as an historiographical concept, the preference for this theme in the Sciences of Spirit is owed to Pierre Nora’s famous article from 1974, „Le retour de l’événement”, which anticipated further great masterpieces like *Logique du sens* (G. Deleuze) or *L’être et l’événement* (A. Badiou). However, we must not ignore mainly the importance of P. Ricoeur’s *L’histoire et vérité* or of the three tomes of *Temps et récit* that could be framed into both ways.

³ See the analysis of Claude Romano (1998). „L’événement journalistique, en tant que corrélat de l’ex-pér-i-ence dégradée”, pp. 273-286, in *L’événement et le monde*.

systematization pertaining to the study of the ways of reading and writing history, continuing with the idea of event in natural sciences and eventually finishing with the logical paradoxes and elements of the set theory⁴.

Always in motion, therefore impossible for us to define it, configuring and reconfiguring in new forms of expressing itself, the event also becomes a privileged theme for phenomenology. What can phenomenology teach us about the event? Almost nothing, if we continue to think exclusively from the perspective illustrated by the principle “back to things themselves!”, because “an event is not a *thing*, but something astir in a thing” (Caputo 2007, 48). If, instead, we think that the event may be another instance of the phenomenality, it definitely has to become a priority for phenomenology. Simple, but also difficult, this observation is sufficient for us to build up the sketch of an ‘anathreptic’ scenario for a constitution of the event.

II. The Concept of Anamorphosis

In natural attitude, we are “conscious of the world endlessly spread out in space, endlessly becoming and having endlessly become in time” (Husserl 1983, 51), a world populated by physical objects, technical devices and animated beings, always “co-present” in our daily preoccupation with things, which is always directed to certain ends. The world of natural attitude also consists of “idealities” found in the theoretical attitude, *e.g.* when we calculate, reason or make various judgements. Moreover, we are “immemorially” familiar with mythical-religious attitudes and thus we share beliefs and convictions about the world as a whole and its meaning. Similarly, we appreciate and admire objects which we consider artistic.

All of these contents of the experience are given to our consciousness within an unseizable perceptive flow, “initially and for

⁴ If we refer to a famous treatise of Alain Badiou (1988). *L'être et l'événement*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.

the most part" *formless*, called "phenomenality". However, we cannot say that all of these resemble an event, at least not in the common way of understanding it – "something unusual", apart from daily routine – that keeps our attention and affects us in every way. In a broad sense, the event is something that opposes and, at the same time, *gives form* to all this neutral phenomenality.

Therefore, not everything that appears in conscienceness as an immanent object is an "event". Although Husserl often mentions "psychic events"⁵ and here and there mentions the enigmatic "fact of world" (*Weltfaktum*), we are convinced that he did not mean to build a lexicon of the event. For us, to think in attempt to overcome the indistinction between phenomenon and event in favor of the later, we have to revisit the canonic determinations of phenomenon, which, as a matter of fact, we are beginning to do. How does the event occur in this formless and also irregular phenomenality?

Let us consider Heidegger's famous meaning of phenomenon in *Being and Time*: "what shows itself in itself (*das Sichzeigende*)" (Heidegger 1996, 25). It is known that the German philosopher begins from the Greek meaning of *phainomenon*, distinguishing between phenomenon as "what is self-showing", "what is manifest" and phenomenon as "semblance". So, let us admit the existence of a frontier which separates the flow of what appears to us perceptively, projective or retentionally, and what evades this flow. Following the perspective opened by Jean-Luc Marion in *Being Given*, we could name this frontier *anamorphosis*

⁵ In Husserl's phenomenology, the event designates every appearance (*Erscheinung*) which occurs during temporal flow, and therefore not being enough "phenomenological" for some independent analysis. It is mentioned in relation to objective realities: objective space, world of objects and physical things (Husserl 1991, 6), but also in defining acts of consciousness (emotions) or acts of embodiment (kinesthetic sensations). The appearance of a temporal object (*e.g.* duration of a melody) in the flow of consciousness involves a wide range of "psychical events": anticipation, based on its retention in this flow, or, on the contrary, the absence of anticipation (a sound yet unheard, but which equally contributes to the unity of the melodic line) (26). Even other acts related to internal consciousness of time, as the representation of an object in consciousness (50) or apprehension – intention of an empty content – (51) have been labeled as "psychical events".

(Marion 2002a, 117; 123; Marion 2002b, 37). Anamorphosis referred initially to an widely spread aesthetic technique, especially in painting and music. This technique is possibly known since ancient times (Romanesque churches and even prehistoric caves), and is famous in paintings like *The Two Ambassadors* of Holbein the Younger (the apparition of the skull and crossbones on the canvas), or in optical illusions.

This technique is also characterized by directing the viewer/listener's perception until an unique form has been isolated, towards an unique and precise point that springs from an indistinct, atonal surface. On the other side, this "bringing to visibility" corresponds to a reformation of the whole compositional ensemble. Therefore, *anamorphosis* could be understood as an "upsurge" in phenomenality (*ana-morphé*), as we are accustomed to talk about upsurge in different factual situations: upsurge of sap, of fever, of blood pressure. The *anamorphosis* establishes the "distance" which separates the luxurious appearance from the vague, concealed aspect of semblance.

At or after the end of this essay, we will have the opportunity to determine three such *anamorphosis* in an "anathreptic" way. This notion names the method used by Plato, specifically in *Major Hippias*. In the context of the Platonic dialogue, the question "what is beauty?" allows seven or eight consecutive "upsurges" from individual beauty to more and more general, close to the Idea, expressions of the beautiful. Even if *anamorphosis* does not lead to generality – because in its way of manifesting, the event forbids something like generality, – this approach will be an anathreptical one, in so far as it takes into account three such consecutive upsurges of phenomenality.

First of them, *con-tingency*, separates what interests us ("what affects us") from every other forms of phenomenality, bound to remain indistinct by our neutral attitude to them. If these phenomena that occur in nature and also affect us can also be considered as con-tingencies, the next *anamorphosis*, determined by factual encounter, will be rendered by *incidental* character. Finally, the last and the most radical *anamorphosis* determines what kind of encounters are the ones that are suitable for the name of *event*. The full status of the event will be marked by using three determinations: *an-archical* character, *certitude* and *incommunicability*. These three *anamorphosis* (*con-tingence*, *incident* and *event*) lead us in the

direction of configuration of a proper concept of the *event*, which eliminates, at least in this phenomenological framework, all non-differentiated utterances and also “self evidences” that confuses the event with the phenomenon.

III. First Anamorphosis: Con-Tingency

Before⁶ *anamorphosis* manifests, the world’s phenomenality proved to be formless, opaque, devoid of an unique point from which the perceptive flow unifies and reshapes the ensemble from which it came. Phenomenality in itself does not render anything to attention, except for its own visibility. The initial lack of form which characterizes the phenomenality of the world is also completed by neutral uniformity for consciousness. It cannot exist a neutral *anamorphosis* in perceiving the world, as if an observer for whom the world is totally insignificant and “is all that obtrudes itself in its worldliness” (Heidegger 1996, 175), as it happens in the fundamental attunement of *Angst*. As, for example, the educated viewer increases the visibility of the ontic status of an “coloured being” of a painting (Marion 2002a, 47), the “upsurge” from the initial, *formless* manifestation to a proper phenomenality, – without being yet an event, – can not happen in a neutral manner, which characterizes at first instance the uniformity of the world.

In order to see how this “neutral-observer” – attitude opposes phenomenality, we have to discuss the other determination of the phenomenon, which belongs to Husserl. For him, every appearance is grasped as a form of duality: “the meaning of the world ‘phenomenon’ is twofold because of the essential correlation between *appearing* (*Erscheinen*) and *that which appears* (*Erscheienden*)” (Husserl 1999, 69). The aprioric correlation between the immanent object of consciousness and

⁶ “Before” is just another way of saying. The *anamorphosis* cannot be expressed temporally, which comes in anteriority or posteriority to our common perception. It may occur every time, in different degrees, as we will have the opportunity to see further. The *anamorphosis* of phenomenality towards incident is only the first step in this “anathreptical” succession.

its modifications cannot be separated from the background of the existence of absolute consciousness, on which this correlation is dependent. The “appearing” of an “appearance” may reach the consciousness flow in different ways, by deploying “according to an indefinite series of adumbrations” (Marion 2002a, 137): it can present itself in a different way than we expect, radically opposed to our expectations or it cannot present itself at all. In extreme, we can imagine the possibility of this missing correlation. Consciousness is nothing else but a flow of possibilities. While its “necessity” is a “condition of possibility for the meaning of the world”, the appearing is completely accidental, as Husserl stresses in the first volume of his *Ideas*:

Over against the positing of world, which is a “contingent” positing, there stands then the positing of my pure Ego and Ego-life which is “necessary”, absolutely indubitable positing. Anything physical, which is given “in person” can be non-existent; no mental process which is given ‘in person’ can be non-existent. (Husserl 1983, 102)

In other words, only the immanent existence of the object in consciousness is truly “necessary”. Instead, its intentional correlation, grasped as individual existence, never repeatable is “contingent”, even if we speak of the phenomenon of the world as a whole: “individual existence, of every sort is, quite universally speaking, ‘contingent’ (*zufällt*)” (7). Truly, everything can be framed into a temporary flow, especially the world as a whole, despite Kant’s opposition in the “Proof” of the “First Conflict of the Transcendental Ideas” (Kant 1998, 470-475), related to finitude of sensible world (*mundus phaenomenon*) in time and space. We cannot think or imagine an eternal world, as a simply subsisting being, or a world that never will have reached to its end.

The world has not the status of mathematical, logical, essences as “ideal” objects, that, according to the Rationalist tradition, have been established as “necessary” or “eternal” by the will of God. Nevertheless, these cannot be attributed, in phenomenological order, meaning according to their appearance, the attribute of necessity. Regardless that we speak about multiplication table or integral calculus, their learning and usage assume every time that they present to *us* in a specific time and space, opening new possibilities of usage. Apart from the “infinities

of numbers which no one will ever take into calculation" (Lacoste 2011, 218), an "ideality" must "affect" one every time, must be a problem regardless of the fact that one knows the solution "(the problem Pappus posed to Descartes), knows it and does not give it (the problem Fermat posed to Fermat), or is ignorant for it and seeks it (the problem Fermat poses to us)" (Marion 2002a, 63).

To aspire to eventfulness, the simple appearance of phenomenon is far from enough. By its arriving, it should *affect* us (*touch* us, *act* on us, *modifying* us, in literal translations of German *zufällig*) the consciousness which experiences it, that is, by reshaping the classical concept of "contingence" to break through the barrier of *uniformity*: "no phenomenon can appear without coming upon me, arriving to me, affecting me as an event that modifies my field (of vision, of knowledge, of life, it matters little here)" (125). According to French phenomenologist's interpretation, one of the features of this reshaped concept (*con-tingence*) is *unpredictable landing (arrivage)*: "the original contingency of the phenomenon is accomplished by its unpredictable landing" (133). Starting from here, a brief schema of phenomenality which contains both a) subsistent beings and b) things "at hand" or *useful things* can be unfolded.

a) Why the "unpredictable landing" of some phenomena is qualified by non-indifference which themselves impose on the *uniformity* of the world? For the simple reason that every phenomenon of this sort does not arrive unexpectedly as an object, but at first glance, as lived by consciousness. For something to land unexpectedly, we first have to wait for it, to "have-something-in-advance" (*Vor-haben*), (Husserl 1970, 51), that is to anticipate the phenomenon that arrives for consciousness in the absence of a sensible intuition, *i.e.* appresentation or protention. In the first situation, we take into account some aspects of the object which are not given intuitively in the present perception. For example, we expect that hidden sides of a cube to be five in a side view or we expect that the alter-ego (analysed by Husserl in the Fifth *Cartesian Meditation*) also has a consciousness, but we can never experience it given as flesh. In the second situation, we intend the future by experience contents which are not given yet, for example we expect that a subsistent object as the ground, remains under our feet when we step on a solid surface. In both situations, the intended object is not indifferent to us and this is shown

by the fact that, every time, we are those who “say something about it”, we describe through language the degree of determination or vacuity of a specific situation: “our expectations on the level of perception are those of what we can say about our actual perception when we undertake to describe it” (Romano 2009, 38). That “all discourse about ... which communicates in what it says has at the same time the character of *expressing itself*” (Heidegger 1996, 152) reinforces the personal, *con-tingent* character of the expectation. Given the situation of the appresented object, we say, for example, that we could expect the other sides of the cube to exist and to be in number of five and we also say that we could not expect to guess their colours. Similarly, we are those who determine in a sentence a fact of protention: we say that we expect a heavy rainstorm in a specific time frame, based on the atmospheric conditions and the weather forecast. But we cannot determine precisely the time when rain occurs.

For its part, the unexpected essentially originates from the pre-disposition of an anticipation. *Unpredictable landing (arrivage)* means our impossibility to “fore-see” the phenomena before seeing them, without warning and without the possibility to calculate their deviation from their usual path. Taking into consideration the *con-tingent* and expressible feature of the expectation, we can also draw some conclusions on that what evades the anticipation. The movement between what corresponds to our expectations and what is unpredictable creates degrees of configuration of the novelty of surprise. We become aware of these degrees only afterwards, when “surprise has torn through the fabric of our expectations, that we realize that we could have said it, that we could have expressed those expectations” (Romano 2009, 43) as: (i) the novelty of every perception, obtained after turning the cube and (ii) the novelty that denies our expectations, remaining, nevertheless, related to these. Even if the weather suddenly got colder, dark clouds gathered on the sky and all weather forecasts announced it, we cannot hide the surprise in front of an unusual snowfall at the beginning of the autumn.

b) Until now, the second condition of eventfulness, *con-tingence*, conceived as “what touches me” was highlighted by characterization, even if too general, of *unpredictable landing*. The novelty that denies our

expectations in appresentation or protention pertains to every consciousness, but this observation is far from assuming the formation of something more than a “psychical event”, in Husserl’s words. That is why, brought to the *incidental* status, novelty must occur in a *factual* context, even a limited one. If until now we dealt only with ideal objects (the cube) and subsistent objects (the heavy rainstorm or the unusual snowfall at the beginning of the autumn), our attention turns now to what we *encounter* in the (*begegnen*) innerworldly preoccupation: the useful thing and the technical device (*zuhanden*). Even in this situation, phenomenality fully certifies the non-indifferent character of the world. According to its specifics, to *come upon me* (*m’advient*) belongs to *con-tingence* and represents another step to overcome the phenomenality towards eventfulness.

The phenomenality of the tool does not manifest in the absence or in incapacity of the practitioner. It appears in itself only when there exists a user able to handle it and who agrees to a training that exasperates his patience, burdens his memory and humiliates him in front of more experienced users. In this respect, tools may be named masonry tools, programming languages, foreign languages we learn by mechanical repetitions of terminations, declinations and conjugations and even our native language. All of us agree with the rules applied to its usage, feeling that it addresses us, despite their generality.

As Heidegger remarks, the tool reaches its maximal phenomenality only after withdrawing: “what is peculiar to what is initially at hand is that it withdraws, so to speak, in its character of handiness in order to be really handy” (Heidegger 1996, 65). The fact that it breaks, that it irritates us when it’s missing or it bothers us (1996, 68) when it is in the way implies every time that it has lost its practicability and, consequently, it disturbs the whole ensemble of useful things that configures the innerworldly handiness. There are situations when corruption of a device, for example of a computer, may disturb the work for a couple of hours or even days for all employees of an office. Furthermore, a power failure can affect the function of many household electrical appliances in a given area. In opposition to Heidegger’s observation, things at hand manifest their *con-tingent* phenomenality even in “working order”, despite that, in these situations, devices cannot manifest themselves without the theoretical well-versed consciousness

of the “expert”⁷, the “technician” or the “troubleshooter”. On the other hand, the *incident* of finding out that even an apparently insignificant thing at hand is “missing” (a certificate, a bill or a file), leads to a “breach in the context of references discovered in our circumspection” (1996, 70). Only from this moment, the thing at hand is rediscovered in its purposefulness (“what-for”) and the unlikely contingencies for its replacing begin.

Following these remarks, a question remains open: whether and how an organized, repetitive work, in which the main emphasis is the foreseen anticipation and in which the *unpredictable landing* has only a secondary role, may be conceived as an *event*, in a whole meaning. In other words, how can one catch the “eventfulness” of centuries-colossal work of building the pyramids, Gothic cathedrals and generally the effort spent for every epochal discovery consigned by history? Are we allowed to speak about a “processual” development of the *event*? As we described those episodes which emphasized the thing at hand encountered within a world (the tool, the device, the equipment), we observe that phenomenality reaches a new significant stage, *anamorphosis* on its way to reach the *event* – the *incident*.

IV. Second Anamorphosis: Incident

A succession of appearances occurs unexpectedly in the *con-tingent* innerwordly horizon. Among them, the “unperceivable light” of a thunder-flash that rifts the sky, the far-away thunderbolt that makes the windows tremble, the deaf noise that accompanies the fall of a flowerpot from a sill blown by the wind or the faint popping sound crack and the

⁷ In this context, it would be opportune to discuss in depth about the conditions of possibility and also the limits of specialization. May the task of the technician from the control station or the specialist in a specific field of medicine match to that of the “specialist” in a certain domain of philosophy or even that of an artist? Is there any difference between that one whose competence is only respiratory disorders and that one whose skills and qualification are based in “medieval philosophy”, “history of science” and even novel or poetry writing?

spreading of the shards on the road that anticipates the noise of a car burst door and the quarrel between the protagonists of the accident, evades, by the way they create their own specific context, the uniformity of the *formless* phenomenality.

These *incidents*, – we name them in this way to distinguish them from metaphysical accident – surpass the foreseeing of the anticipation and its exception, the unexpected, which were discussed in previous analysis on appresentation and protension. One encounters *incidents* only in situations similar to the device that refuses to function. Before moving to the next level of constitution, namely to this new *anamorphosis*, of the phenomenality described before, a confusion persists and we address this below.

Among superior phenomena, one could mention even innerworldly changes, which apparently do not “arrive for us”, like subsistent beings. About these, average intelligibility, influenced by the daily-journalistic approach of the “event”, qualifies their disastrous appearance as “extreme”: avalanches, floods, earthquakes. Their *con-tingence* seems to be doubtful, especially because their expression through language is ambiguous and, consequently, their ontic status remains undetermined. Whilst some “ordinary” phenomena, as “it rains”, “it lights” the sky, “it snows” are impersonally expressed, the others have a quite determined individuality. For example, when we speak about “Hurricane Katrina”, we all know precisely what we mean, even though many other phenomena of almost this kind occur every year in different regions of the Earth. However, such an amplitude innerworldly ‘appearance’ was known only once, and there is no chance for it to repeat itself.

Although language ambiguities disappear since, in dealing with such subsistent beings, one takes into account their “lack of ontic assignation” (Romano 1998, 37). Unlike some other “facts” which are reducible to a sentence-subject, about subsistent beings we cannot say anything, except that “they occur”, as innerworldly facts: they do not have their own “historicity”, even a rudimentary one. Their mere existence is not due to anyone else but their own occurrence. In other words, we cannot affirm their existence, unless a witness associates them in hermenutical contexts. Heidegger plays on this idea too, when he says that “only *Da-sein* can be meaningful (*sinnvoll*) or meaningless

(*sinnlos*)" (Heidegger 1996, 142). Following him, Sartre expresses it in a similar way: "in the absence of this witness, there is being before and after the storm – that is all. If a cyclone can bring about the death of certain living beings, this death will be destruction only if it is experienced as such" (Sartre 1984, 8). Even though, because these group of phenomena are not destined to someone, their *unpredictable landing* occurs without anything else than itself, as long as there is a witness these are not indifferent to us, and consequently, they are also submitted to *con-tingence*.

As becomes clear from the above analysis, some innerworld "extreme" facts, as subsistent beings, without "ontic assignation", manifest their *con-tingent* character of *unpredictable landing* within the pre-determined context of the world, in its meaning of simply subsistent being.

However, the same thing cannot be said about the *incident*. When we refer to it, we often point out its "violent encounter" feature, according to which it *imposes every time factically*. Heidegger stresses explicitly that, apart from all beings, only *Da-sein* has a special encounter with beings at hand, with those like him and even with subsistent beings, unlike "two beings which are objectively present within and are, moreover, *worldless* in themselves, can never 'touch' each other, neither can 'be', 'together with' the other " (Heidegger 1996, 52). Only due to the encounter, in accordance to its *con-tingent* nature, the *incident* is not indifferent to *us*, as we are not "distant" from it, it must every time happen only in a *factual* context. Even if counter-intuitive, when we skid on a frozen street, lose balance and for a moment feel the shock of the blow, the *incident* commences from us, we are those who "oppose" the ice, "bring about the encounter" (*sich begegnen*) with the ice, and not viceversa. Regardless of the *incident's* scale and proportions, in a colloquial language, even when we talk about a collision that we qualify without thinking about it as being a crash, and even when we talk about incidents between protesters and security forces, we highlight the *factual* character of the *incident*. *Incident* may occur in any of the factual varieties; thus it is not a special situation with on and off occurrence: when we "produce" something, when we use tools or technical devices, and, as shown above, even when, in case of a breakdown these interrupt their proper function, when we talk to somebody (facticity of the everyday being-with) and even when, stupefied, we notice the ravages

and ruins of an 'extreme' innerworld calamity. The undetermined manner in which a *con-tingent* fact can lead to an *incident*, without being in itself an *incident*, was observed by Aristotle (1025a 28-29). One's unintentional arrival to Aegina is due to a situation which depends on a context, accordingly, on an external (*heteron*) situation: the tempest. Even the theoretic observation of a tempest or the astonishment in front of the eruption of a volcano may appear as *incidents*.

Before going further, we have to face a new confusion. Common language does not distinguish between the phenomenological concept of *incident* and the metaphysical meaning of accident. The self-evidence of common sense understanding interprets them as if among these there is a subordination relationship, as the one of species to genus. In the same way as *con-tingence*, the translation and the re-formulation of the notes of the "accident" (*symbebēkos* as "what goes with", in a literally translation) from the metaphysical language of Aristotle into the phenomenological notes of the *incident* is owed to Jean-Luc Marion, too (Marion 2002a, 151 sq.). However, the definition of the dictionary, that of "a small – event that comes up" and implicitly, the drawing of a dividing line between *incident* and the *event* on exclusively quantitative criteria, broadly plausible in the broader context of the determination of the event as "saturated by quantity", cannot satisfy us in our approach to range phenomenality in its road to becoming the *event*.

Until now, the *incident* was characterized by contrast to innerworld appearances through the *factual* context in which it occurs. Even if it appears within a "productive" activity, as withdrawing the tool or the unpredictable material of production, or it appears on the street traffic as a crash or it manifests into a painful injury which "sets us aside" for the moment, the *incident* cannot affect us except in a restricted, determined *factual* context, without modifying radically the course of *facticity* in which it occurs. Moreover, the incident implies a definite number of quasi-inexhaustible causal explanations which lends itself to a complex causal "*archo-logy*" (Romano 1998, 57). Thus, the crash of two automobiles may be reduced, if one eliminates its small variables for the physical calculus, to the action and reaction principle, as the skid on the ice may be reduced to frictional forces and the law of falling bodies, after a methodical abstraction. In conceiving the *incident*, physical explanations

may be doubled by psychological or sociological explanations: the same age, the same affiliation to a circle of friends, common intellectual interests contribute, as “sufficient reasons” to an encounter. An encounter may certainly be conceived as “confrontation”, – if not as an “opposition”⁸ with every appearance that occurs innerworldly: we are facing a foreign landscape, an experience so terrifying for the one who experienced it to later recall it, even the street that “sticks” itself to one’s shoe soles which, according to another observation of Heidegger, is ontologically further remote than the acquaintance one meets while walking twenty steps away (Heidegger 1996, 99).

Among all of these, there are a few *incidents* which are privileged because they lead directly to understanding the mode of being of the *event*. As, at this time, Claude Romano points out, “an encounter that will eventually be capital can seem insignificant at first; an incurable sickness could take the form of the benign condition at the beginning” (Romano 2009, 46). We might, as well, affirm the opposite. It is possible that one’s encounter with one’s own past (lived in awareness or the immemorial), as in the first situation, to be a missed one. In this respect, what does truly mean the encounter with the other, with our own death and, even more genuinely, the encounter with our own birth?

From this point, we could infinitely ask regressive questions. From what it means the real “encounter” with the parents, to an authentic experience of the others and from an appropriate approach to our death to an adequate meaning of our “original non-originality of the origin” (Romano 1998, 96) attested by the phenomenon of our birth. Eventually, the ultimate confrontation faces the human with history. This was splendidly expressed by Balzac in the words of his character, Rastignac at the gates of Paris: “now it’s between us!”. How could we find out the meaning of the confrontation between the individual human and the *event* “that changes the face of the world”? Of course, we cannot find answers to this avalanche of problems, where each of them needs specific contexts of interpretation. All we can do, starting with some

⁸ As in the above mentioned meaning that the translation of *begegnung* has shown.

factual situations, is to show why the *event* is the most radical, the sharpest and the highest degree of phenomenality.

V. Third Anamorphosis: The Event

Only the *event* institutes the phenomenality of the breakthrough. What was only foreshadowed in the analysis of the unpredictable *contingence* and the factual *incident* fulfills now in the form of a radical discontinuity. Remember that our initial hypothesis was that the *event* means something different from phenomenon. In analogy to the “event horizons” of the black holes surface in astrophysics, which supposedly, due to their immense gravitational field obstruct the entrance of any kind of radiations, what we could call *event*, according to this new and radical *anamorphosis*, forbids us, by its uncontrollable manifestation, to experience and also to express it through language. It appears “irrespective of” us and even “against” us. Is this the only reason why this “upsurge” in phenomenality is so different and so radical compared to the previous levels?

(a) Unlike the *incident*, the *event* evades its causes, so we could say that it has an *an-archical* character. In the light of the *event*, every possible or imaginable cause which could be attributed to it, which precedes it or is preceded by, cannot be considered as sufficient. That is why we will say that the *event* is uncontrollable; (b) the *event* has already occurred, without preventing us to experience and to express it in any moment lived after. As an *imminent, accomplished* (irrevocably done) fact, it is also *certain*; (c) according to its manifestation, the *event* blocks any possibility to say something about it and even to name it, so it has an *inexpressible* character. Detailing these reasons would not lead just to a careful consideration of the specificity of this *anamorphosis* of the highest degree, but it also opens genuine access to a “physiology” of the *event*, understood as radically different from a fruitless research of its “essence”, as metaphysical thinking has done for centuries.

At the first glance, the *event* seems, according to our road’s logic flaw, an incident “out of control”, so all we can do is to apply the strategy of thinking the *event* starting from the *incident*. The minor

outbreaks of factual “encounters” which we have characterized as *incidents* may or may not spread uncontrollably, but this does not mean that the *incident* should be placed as the origin of the *event*. On the contrary, the *event* is identical to its own origin and fundamentally different from all that the “first cause” notion intends. Even if, occurring every time according to the instantaneous character of *unpredictable landing*, in an order always determined by a *factual* context, the *event* is the one that overthrows and also reshapes the context by its unique manifestation.

In opposition to what was attributed to a causal chain or to a finality, in the *incident's* case, the *event* (a) proves its *an-arhic* character that goes beyond any causal horizon. Even if it occurred in a *factual* context, an *event* cannot be foreseen by anything, so one cannot explain it by only invoking explanations, hypothesis, theories or ideologies. These come only after the *event* “has passed”, even if, technically speaking, the event does never “passes away”. If we could conceive it in a causal manner, the *event* reduces its worth to the status of thing at hand (a technical device, *Zuhandenheit*) and which, through its usage we can foresee, or, more specific, to a factual, meaningless “meeting” and without consequences. The casual coming across of two neighbors almost every day in the nearest park will not have the importance of an *event*, of that *anamorphosis* emphasised by J.-L. Marion in his example of Montaigne’s friendship with La Boétie (Marion 2002b, 37). The respectful, although indifferent glimpse of the neighbors does not correspond to that “looking for each other before seeing each other” or to the thoughtful attempt to situate the other one “to the point where the look of the other could, consequently, settle on him”. The *incident* of the predictable coming across in the park does not break the rhythm of *factual* life, its occurrence is not without warning or anticipation. Even if, in this situation, there is a certain degree of unexpectedness, the *incident* has nothing to do with a “celebration”, does not refer to anything else but the neighbors’ state of affairs: the walk in the park.

If not every *factual* encounter leads to an *event*, the *event* often manifests as an encounter which is uncontrollable, unlike the *incidental* coming across. In this respect, one can talk about “traumatic” experiences, as the terrifying moments of experiencing death in any of its forms (the other’s death, the omnipresent death in the battlefield,

even our own death), the incomparable intensity of a religious revelation or an artistic vocation (Romano 2009, 44 *sq.*) and even more, the crucial phenomenon of birth impossible to reconstitute, since it occurred “without us” (Marion 2002b, 41, Romano 1998, 95-112). Although one’s death may be always attributed to a convergence of causes, embracing a vocation may be attributed to some innate features and somebody’s birth may be patiently prepared and expected, we can say that none of these were decided and suggested. Even if we understand the causes of one’s death and we come to terms with our own death, we cannot conceive causally and rationally the privileged *now* (*das Jetzt*), that occurs in precisely that moment. The representation of “suddenly” (corresponding to Greek *to exaiphnes*) that marks the passing over from the living body to the simply subsistent being of a dead corpse remains one of the great mysteries of humanity, which cannot be solved by causality by all means. Likewise, the dreadful moment of the “caesura” instituted by the terrifying “order” and felt by the “chosen one”, determines the latter to simply give up in his attempt to look for an explanation, suddenly modifying his worldview, along with his past acquisitions and their alleged possibilities: “in a certain sense, the conversion isn’t carried out by anyone: Paul has not been converted by representatives of ‘the Church’; he has not been won over. [...] The event – ‘it happened’ purely and simply, in the anonymity of a road”, appreciates Alain Badiou the breakthrough which turned Saul from a prosecutor to an Apostle (Badiou 1997, 17; The Acts of the Apostles, 9:3-6).

If we refer to the situation of our own birth, the dismissal of causality is even more difficult to notice, because we are not confronted with an appearance different from all others. In spite of being factually “present” to our own moment of origin, in our lifetime we never cease to intend it. Neither the study of genealogies nor testimonies of those present to this originary moment or our own secondary memories can explain this *event* that paradoxically “does not belong to us”. Apart from death, at which appearance one can “still do something”, (as Tolstoy shows in the novel *The Death of Ivan Ilytch*), birth presents itself as “once for all”. However, this initial character manifests ceaselessly as the original apperception of “I am”, implied every time in every conscious

act. Moreover, beyond its quality of “originary impression”, the birth, more than death or spiritual rebirth, refers to other *events* that do not appear in our consciousness as major collective, large manifestations, to which history has gave over time the “epochal” meaning and which, in turn, confirm the *an-archy* of the *event*. Even the historical *event* eludes its causes and thus the causes always come after it, in spite of the overabundant information, sources, testimonies, documents, statistics of all kind. By this, we certainly do not suggest that the titanic work of an “army” of archivists, scholars, historians would be useless, but only that, no matter how well documented, this work could not express the entire meaning of the *event*: “the event has no causes, because *it is its own origin*. In it truly lies the authentic meaning of human adventure” (Romano 1998, 60).

In other words, in its quality of *accomplished fact*, we can observe some causes of the *event*, to find others and even imagine counterfactually how it could have happened otherwise. All of these belong to the continuity of history, accepted by the *event*. But none of these, all the permutations among them and even all of these combined, could light the “spark” that delivers the burst: “it is precisely this overabundance that forbids assigning it a cause, and even forbids understanding it through a combination of causes” (Marion 2002a, 168).

(b) If it is true that the *event* signifies mainly the evasion of causality, one may argue that the truth of Sarajevo assassinate, which, as we know, commenced the hostilities of First World War, appears to have the same ontological status as the certainty of our own death: “the fact that demise, as an event that occurs, is ‘only’ empirical certain, in no way decides about the certainty of death” (Heidegger 1996, 238). The certainty does not show us only that the *event* evades the amount of all its causes, but also its *accomplished fact*, which even happened once and for all, even if it is imminent, namely it cannot be avoided in anyway. Considering that, what has already occurred has the certain, irremediable character of an *accomplished fact*, and consequently nobody is ever able to remove its traces, in the same way what stays in front of us cannot be avoided or experienced by another whom we ask to “take our place for a moment”.

The premonition of its radical novelty (the feeling that “nothing is going to be the same from now on”), which follows the progress of an historical *event*, cannot be anticipated in comparison to other previous *events*. Therefore, the certainty of the *event* lies on the nonrepeatable absorbency of every kind of imaginable cause which could be assigned to it and manifests by changing the “texture” of this causality, by breaking the arrangement of the factual context from which it stems and eventually infringe even upon the world’s *con-tingence*, as it was established after the first *anamorphosis*. Even if the *event* lands every time “for us”, according to its *con-tingence*, it establishes a special form of necessity – a phenomenological, not metaphysical necessity. Accordingly, the *event* seems to be uncontrollable and either impossible for us to handle. In this respect, maintaining that we are the ones who “propose”, “organize” or “participate” to “events”, is just an improper way of speaking. Unlike the *incident*, which we could “oppose”, the specificity of the *anamorphosis* of the *event* consists of the impossibility of consciousness to control it. However, its infringement on the *con-tingence* is not a complete one, as long as not even only one who was touched by the “eye” of the *event*’s “cyclone” could remain indifferent. This is shown clearly below, in the analysis of the event in the frame of the discourse.

(c) Following the twofold meaning, borrowed from J.-L. Marion, the *anamorphosis* takes into account the element able to unify the whole factual context and that which distinguishes its appearance from the tarnished, insipid semblance of this *formless* ensemble. In the situation of the *event*, it is not the semblance that remains in the secondary plane of something that “hides in its appearance”, but it determines from the beginning its mode of being. The *common* concept of *event* which is the one “distorted”, within “the possibility of being deceiving and misled” (Heidegger, 1996, 32), often manifests in the discourse.

What can, in our analysis, be put into evidence through the “common concept of event”? Is this, at the first glance, something that conceals us, as we have said, obscuring us as well, from itself? Certainly not, as long as we continue to refer to somebody’s life path as a well determined succession of “events” about which public sphere has already decided its “progress”: birth, christening, graduation, employment, finding a job, birth of the children and so on. It is possible

that their doubtful importance for us qualifies them as “events”. Understood as being “preordained”, they recreate a predetermined progress that “we can expect”, as the spaces intentionally left blank in a family album. The average comprehension does not take into account even the expression of the basic status of the eventfulness, *con-tingence* and its feature of *unpredictable landing*. To this degenerated understanding also contributes the average opinion, resulted from the selection generated by the hierarchy that the “others”, influenced by the tyranny of the journalistic “event”, undergo through contagion. Judging over what deserves to be transmitted and in what form was also in the preoccupations of the “professional” historians. Thus we can mention one of the critiques brought by Paul Ricoeur when he addresses incompleteness of historical objectivity, whose selection still persists another unquestionable “judgement of importance” (Ricoeur 1998, 26). Behind the historical writings pretense to offer a certain criteria of objectivity hides the subjectivity of the one who tacitly reiterates what was transmitted to him as important.

Therefore, “initially and for the most part”, the *event* presents itself to us with these two appearances. Neither the public sphere (“the They”, following Heidegger’s so well-known expression), nor historians pretense of objectivity cannot negate that its *an-archic* and also a *certain* nature creates difficulty up to the impossibility to talk about “what-it-cannot-be-adequately-said”, the *event*. There are numerous situations in which we get frightened or stumble on words exactly for the reason that these could not express the thing we are most afraid of, the *event*. Not only we deliberately evade it, but often, even its final nature burdens to the extent of impossibility the talking about what cannot adequately be spoken. Take again the example of the *event* of death. The common talking about death is determined from the sentence: “one also dies in the end, but for now one is not involved”. In the German philosopher’s analysis dedicated to death, temptation, tranquillization and estrangement of the others in relation to the “dying person” represent an entangled flight from death which leads to an improper understanding even about their own death (Heidegger 1996, 235). If we speak about the spiritual rebirths, even under the appearance of changing a letter in the name of a character (metanomasty) in the examples of Abraham and St.

Paul, these produce a change not in just in their names, but they also reshape the world by institution of a new harmony in the universal order (Agamben 2005, 9).

In presence of the death, birth or spiritual rebirths we become speechless, thus we conclude that these have an *inexpressible* character. The language proves itself useless both for the one who is going to die and for those who witness his death. These are neither supreme occasions for a "final discourse" (as happens in the movies), nor occasions for "gratifying", "festive", "commemorative" speeches of the others. The awkwardness with which the language addresses these both *an-archic* and *certain events* is inscribed in our impossibility to control them.

Living in itself, the lingering in the while of something definitive, a situation without the possibility of being reversed, or in any case, a situation of which we know that it will never be the same, regardless if it manifests in the individual or collective realm of history, breaks the discourse. There are few events in which, by their sheer force, they break through the where anything said is equivalent with "saying nothing". In each situation not only the word becomes useless, but also its absence. Thus, there are situations when the presence of the one who has the unpleasant task to say something is useless. While it matters a little who says "whom and what", the solemnity or even the nuance of the humor brought in the discourse do not; practically, all that matters is the fact that the *event* occurred, and what was lost cannot be brought back and furthermore it cannot be brought back by words. I think that these situations that happen to leave us speechless emphasize in a kaleidoscopic or even chronological manner (although it is obvious that we speak of a different chronology) the "quiet" way in which one relates to the event.

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HUSSERL, FASHION AND ITS CLOTHES: INTRODUCING THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL PROJECT OF THE VESTIARY OBJECT

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Abstract

The article tackles the current conditions in which a phenomenological application can be done, in the case of having the domain of phenomenological practice as culturally expelled, even from the outskirts of European philosophy. In light of Husserl's phenomenology, the way in which the natural attitude manifests with regard to the phenomenon of fashion and clothes will be uncovered, after which it will be explored in what terms can a phenomenological project of the vestimentary object become a fresh, relevant endeavor.

Keywords: vestimentary object, phenomenology, meaning and movement, natural attitude and its shortcomings in philosophy, Husserl, fashion.

I. Introduction

Near the end of her career, Vivienne Westwood wrote on the front webpage of an academic journal called "Fashion Theory" that its publication is a necessity for both students and professionals alike, in order to make them understand that "fashion has meaning as well as form". While steering away from all eidetic-related meanings connected to the notion of "form", the British iconic fashion designer underlines a fairly natural aspect, though not one that stands out in the context of belonging to a culture that evens out its foundation to a distinction. While still maintaining a suspicious gaze when dealing with sensuous objects, European culture somehow started to budge nearly all of its

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conceptual deposits which, long ago, were continuously referring to any formally distinguishable entities outside human perception as a primary way of being. It was somewhat unsurprising that, for an area of human activity such as that of clothes-making (and its complementary aesthetical considerations) – an area predominantly reachable through direct, unmediated sensuous experience – philosophy would award it a constant undermining attitude, and theory-makers would under-appreciate the phenomenon of fashion almost as if a philosophical analysis of this remote, deserted place of human experience can never be able to hook-up with those fine objects of human rationality – ideas.

Westwood proposes a more worldly understanding of “form”, as a motion defined, artificial, *vestiary body*. If we were to advance this, the “body” is seen as the fabric that envelops the wearer in a certain field of ways that emerges from the movements of that particularly animated wearer, meaning that the differences between cloth and vestiary body appear to reside near or around the concept of “animation”. While being manufactured by using a certain blend of crafting skills (*technes*), that vestiary body is an artificial body from at least two perspectives, the first being formal-ontological, while the second – phenomenological. Through the lens implied by the first perspective, we can fairly say that a jacket has the “nature” of an artifactual, unanimated matter, devoid of life – an object in the world, subject-less. If we go on and ask ourselves “what is a jacket?” while using the first perspective, we only reach answers whose mission is to rephrase the question in order to get new signification out of it, a new concept or some fresh sentences, that fill the need to know what the answer to that question really is: “an object”, “an (unthinking) thing”, “some filled portion of space”, “a particular entity”, “a tool lacking being”, or maybe just “an illusion”. On the other hand, phenomenological inquiry begins with questions that are related to the concrete, subjective experience that never bails out from any frame of analysis: “how does a jacket fit into human experience?”, “how is a jacket constituted as intentional object in front of human perception fields?” or “how does a difference between the tactile experience of wool fiber and the visual experience of the same thing emerge?”. Either way, it seems that the shared aspect of any phenomenologically configured questions is the intention of doing a fully-fledged analysis of the

experience of some vestimentary object, while moving against the idea of mapping out the categories and the hierarchies that can be conceived in relation to those types of objects. So lays open the path to understanding the way in which a jacket is not just a moving artificial body, but a *meaning bearing body sunk in constant motion*, or, in short, a phenomenon.

The stakes develop on the long run, which is why we must already distinguish between some notions that, if still entangled at a later stage, might undermine the analysis. Westwood talks about clothes in the context of them already being a part of fashion. Because of that, it is fair to say that fashion is a part of culture. That tells us that fashion, as a culturally configured phenomenon, is also an artifactual one. Then again, so are sunglasses. Or slim fit shirts. They're also manufactured, they're also artefacts, and that begs us to ask the question aiming at the difference between those two, while keeping in mind that we ought to try and find both distances and similarities in these two types of objects. By using Husserl's *epoché* on both of them, some more or less chosen areas of significance that are permanently connected to the two ("fashion" and "sunglasses")² will now be bracketed. At a first glance, we can easily say that experience of the sunglasses goes both through the visual and tactile means of perception. We simultaneously touch and see through our "eye remodeling devices" that so many love to use, which is not what we can say about fashion. Not that we do not perceive fashion, but we do not perceive it the way we perceive a smooth silky shirt. When dealing with such philosophical scenarios, we are most likely intrigued by the fact that there might be something amiss, though we cannot actually pin-point it. This is where the phenomenological reduction comes in.

II. Applying the Phenomenological Reduction

What do we do when confronted with technology-related concepts like "being", "subject", "self" or "idea"? What options do we have besides

² Some reductions will be improved by adding or removing clusters of meaning that are welded together, scarcely connected or a central notion, as the text develops. These are natural occurrences amidst phenomenological applications.

forcing our way through various nets of senses that arise when we wonder “what would being be”, “how can I understand my own subjectivity”, “what structures does the self-conceal” or “what ontological status does an idea have”? And even if we bend those bunches of meaning that pertain to whatever central concepts we work with, if we recontextualize those altered meanings, if we link together something so unrelatable (like philosophy and clothes) that instantly becomes interesting, or even rewrite and rebrand them as new, “fresh ideas”, can we still call these cases of conceptual manipulation – philosophy? This is where the phenomenological reduction arose, at a time when philosophy seemed to be stuck.

For Husserl, the reduction is the main method through which we manage to surpass the classical *aporias* of European philosophy, by treating them as artefacts of meaning. When identified as such, the interpreter can suspend notions that may appear vague or misplaced, mainly because he can. If a concept is a constructed entity that bears bulks of meaning, then it can also be avoided (not to say, deconstructed) through the same means by which it was made to be. While suspended notions pave the way for a clearer view of the others, “free” and untouched, the reduction starts to produce self-standing results, as the interpreter gets to know what exactly can be gained or lost through suspending this or that concept, after which he might, at some point, come across those famed things in themselves, that is, *the experience of those things in themselves*. Of course, phenomenology is not about seeing the *eidōs* of a human being or the doorstep-in-itself, but more about experiencing (grasping) the backbone of the experience constituting processes that we are always having throughout our lives. That’s why the first step towards phenomenology understood as rigorous science – the evidence – is, “in an extremely broad sense, an experiencing of *something* that is, and is thus” (Husserl 1960, 12). When different concepts and, more importantly, various cultural habits are suspended, we seem to gain a deeper, more meaningful insight into what makes us be the way we usually are. We gather evidence and we gather it as meaningful content from our most basic areas of human experience and, if guided by a method specially crafted for clearing up the whole mess involved by our multiple nets of experience, we might

be able to fully grasp the whereabouts of our most intimate human habits. But this means that some evidence, which helps us reach a fuller understanding of the inner working of experience, must be somehow differentiated from other, lesser evidence.

If we closely follow the first (Cartesian) meditation (§7-§9), we get to see that, for Husserl, the world must go through the reduction, as its counterpart, “the evidence of world-experience would, at all events, need to be criticized with regard to its validity and range, before it could be used for the purposes of a radical grounding of science, and that therefore we must not take that evidence to be, without question immediately apodictic” (Husserl 1960, 18). For phenomenology, the being of the world, by reason of the evidence of natural experience, says Husserl, must no longer be an obvious matter of fact, which is why we must see the importance of getting to an apodictic type of evidence, through the phenomenological reduction. Well, if our simple being in the world must go through the reduction, it is implied that also all cultural artefacts that we are used to must also be placed under the same conditions. And if talking about the experience of the world and not the world in itself, it becomes clear that evidence can be safely called apodictic only when it has a *direct* correlation to a *basic, usually passive experience, or range of experiences*, being *unmediated* in its relationship with those felt realities by any artefact that might distort the “original” meaning of that subjectively lived slice of life.

What must be remembered from this very rough sketch of the phenomenological method is that any attempt to work with the reduction and apply it to some third party domain of interest presupposes that the method itself is open to alteration, and that it will suffer changes. Like a continuous oscillation between the method and the content of study, (applied) phenomenology will take care of all artefacts that stick together to scarcely occurring pure subjective experience and clear up all misunderstandings that frequently mingle with the subject at hand.

III. Some Usual Considerations Concerning Clothes

When writing about natural attitude in correlation to the better, more refined, phenomenological attitude, Husserl does not mean that

the first should be eradicated. In fact, the natural attitude that we colloquially seem to have and constantly fuel up should be suspended in order to be subsequently enriched by knowing the structures of meaning that permanently lie beneath it. If we are to apply phenomenology to the domain inhabited by clothes, we need to round up some usual attitudes, “natural” attitudes regarding those objects and their synthesized form of appearance – fashion. By doing this, we will come to understand that common perspectives on the matter at hand will not be stigmatized and eliminated from course. In fact, they are not to be treated as simple opinions or weak ideas, but as the starting point for a full-on phenomenological tackling of the subject, which means that they are not only gathered perspectives, but a coherent frame of conditions for any future analysis that may more or less reconfigure their sets of meaning.

We all know that everybody dresses up at some point in their lives. Most of us do it daily. That’s why it’s easy to guess that anybody would agree: vestimentary objects are universally known, created and used, no matter the sex, religion, geopolitical context, and so on. Any person that is presented with some form of textile material, remodeled into something that can be worn, will understand what is the basic palette of acts to be eventually enacted regarding that object. However, even if recognized as a vestimentary object, it does not imply that it will be appropriately worn, delivering us our first distinction and common thought recurrence. Successfully recognizing an object as a vestimentary object does not imply that one will also know the “right” way of using it, or, with more accuracy, the *intended* way of using it. In essence, one act does not imply another, and furthermore, one act does not imply the possibility of another. This is a logical truism as much as it is a stalemate, which means that any perspective that wants to know more must go deeper and remark some differences between those two kinds of “acts”. With minimal philosophical skill, we can still perform under natural attitude and ask a second, more meaningful question that can peel off some extra meaning from our dilemma.

By what standards do we know which velour jacket is the finest? This still is a problem that can be discussed at large under natural attitude, given the fact that it is centered on the concept of “value”, which largely means that it can accept an infinite amount of relativism

into its context of discussion. Ironically, it is also a question that usually produces just two types of answers. The first would maintain that the standard is imposed by professionals of the field, creators of critics, and that they would know what's best for everyone regarding fashion. The second would, of course, go against the first, by saying that each is their own judge of taste when it comes to clothes. This is usually regarded as an already classic debate between predetermined aesthetics and free individual taste. This is the most frequent of all dilemmas sprung out by natural attitude and it is to be found among the broadest range of people. Even if knowing what clothes are does not imply knowing how to appropriately use them, it seems that knowing what clothes are does imply knowing some sense related to the value that those clothes have. After all, everyone knows how to brag about clothes, and this is specifically where the natural attitude fails to advance – and where some new way of inquiry can come in and flourish.

Besides all of these, there is yet another conceptual situation laid out by natural attitude that eventually ends up as a dead-end, as accurately described by Lars Svendsen in his book about fashion and philosophy called *Fashion: A Philosophy*. From his interpretation of the matter, it is a specific idea that catches the eye, an idea that acts like a constructed, conventional, high-order driving force behind fashion, and is always littered on top of the basal meaning of particular vestimentary objects: How novel is the idea of “New”?

How is fashion aware of its continuous search for the new? When referring to the new, are we talking about new materials, colors and shapes, or are we pointing at new expressions that emerge out of movement? All of these questions usually occur around fashion theorists, who tirelessly ask about the aspects that can be conceived along this concept of “new”. As Svendsen tells us, “all fashion theorists stress the new as the basic characteristic of fashion” (Svendsen 2006, 25), with one exception, that of architect Adolf Loos who considered that only object with enough elapsed duration can constitute some form of fashion. All in all, it seems that temporality is just an aspect correlated to the notion of “new”, and that professionals rationalizing about clothes and fashion within the natural attitude, mistake the new for a conceptual opportunity upon which they can imagine newer and newer

definitions of the term, while it is in fact suffering from being overdefined. By default, concepts such as “the new” have an increased number of meanings attached, even though the links between those specific areas of meaning remain fuzzy, unclear, or cannot be perceived in any way. It must be said that this rarely bothers anyone while under natural attitude. After all, as long as a concept has correlates (or, as long as a term has some meaning), it does not matter how clear are the connections to those correlates. The same case regarding the “new”: if we can link situations, things, events, and others to this concept of “new”, then it can be used within a philosophical framework. As before, phenomenology aims to recover any basic hidden sense that the natural understanding of the “new” misses.

Up until this point, we saw that theorizing on fashion usually moves around aesthetic hierarchies, discussions about higher values and the nature of the “new”. If some collection of scarves is new (the latest), does it become valuable? In what ways can some aged denim pair of pants be of value, or even the spark needed to mark the return of a vintage fashion? Philosophically, it seems that we can distinguish between two main interwoven pillars on which interpretations coming from the natural attitude stand upon: *duration* and *charm*. Even though classic philosophy prefers “time”, “temporality” or “historicity”, duration is here important because it does not call out to all those meanings which hint at multiple interpretations of history and the changes regarding human values. A similar view can be found in Aristotle’s account of time, in the *Physics IV, 11* where time doesn’t exist without change as we seize that time is an element of movement – “when we perceive that some time has passed, simultaneously it would seem that motion has occurred; but, because it is not movement by itself, necessarily it will be something *of* movement; but because the moved object is moved from one starting point to one finish point and because any measure is continuous in nature, it means that movement follows measure” (*Physics*, 219a). All of this means that the sheer feeling of having something measurable in the context of change – having a duration – is closer to practice and practically formed meaning than “historicity” or “temporality” are. More on that, duration does not only refer to quantity (e.g. for how long did those moving feet dance?), as

being phenomenologically conceived hinting that is also encompasses areas of sense pertaining to quality (*e.g.* for how long did you feel that the dance took place?), and also a third, synthesized version of those two, that sticks to the particularities of the analysed situation (*e.g.* how did you feel the trails of motion in Plisetskaya's tan-beige singlet, as part of her interpretation of the Bolero?). In short, when talking about duration, we feel we talk more appropriately about more sensuous areas of interest, such as clothes and fashion, which is what we can also say about charm. However, a more complete analysis of charm, be it configured by natural attitude or phenomenology, cannot take place here, as it relies on other sections of meaning which have not yet been disclosed or fully analyzed. But what can take place here instead is a sketch of how phenomenology can stick its nose into fashion and culture, while brushing off all undesired ways of constructing a philosophy of clothes.

IV. Applied Phenomenology is not only “of Something”

As many other great human achievements, phenomenology is not an activity “of another activity”, but an “apodictical” activity, one main discipline of actions (be those thematic or reflective-thematic actions) that is not founded on and not exercised for another, more foundational domain. Phenomenology is not “predicate” for another “subject” than the one that all disciplines and areas of knowledge rely upon – human experience. That is why phenomenology is not a natural attitude configured cross-breed between comparative history of ideas and excessive “in-depth” reshaping of meanings through various lettermen derived methods like: overstretching etymologies, bypassing usual context while reforging meaning for the artificial context of argument, using alliteration as disclosure of some previously unformulated truism (*e.g.* after all, it's not about the original, but the originary!), making up words from recognizable fragments of meaning³ (usually from ancient

³ Besides Molière's “Imaginary Invalid” and the newly conceived *soporific* factor seen as the essence of opium, be sure to check out Deacon (1997, 28-39).

Greek or Latin), and so forth. Phenomenology does not associate with such kinds of philosophical attitudes because they rely on the unspoken idea that they are always a discourse “of something”, and not “for something”, meaning that they work from outside the subject area which they are debating, assuming the artificial form of objectivity that, by definition, bypasses the input coming from experience and all subjective, felt aspects. When phenomenological activity remains undisturbed by this objective “white coat of truth” (Sheets-Johnstone 2011, 352), woven from either technical or humanistic sciences, then phenomenology becomes what it was meant to be in the first place: a reconfiguring presuppositionless science that encompasses subjective felt realities and gets results that are meaningful for the human lifeworld (Husserl 1970, 6-8) or, as James Dodd also remarks in his essay about Husserl’s lush text, “science, in its contemporary form, fails to address what needs to be addressed, not in order to be science, but in order to be a human being” (Dodd 2004, 30).

All of that means that a phenomenology of the vestimentary object cannot be limited to an interpretation of facts about various fashions that arose and dispersed far and wide through European culture for almost three millennia. Of course that phenomenology can use certain well documented interpretations about how 14th century stall owners were dressed when celebrating Christmas – as raw material – but it must be made clear that any interpretations that simply link some historical instances belonging to an intuited pattern (*e.g.* 13th, 14th and 15th century stall owner clothes in Lower Saxony) to a more abstractly formed meaning (*e.g.* earlier prebaroque habitualities that ended up as baroque statements) are only interpretations of a prephenomenological attitude. In need of supplementary refining, those interpretations need to grasp that it is not so much the “causal” link that matters in phenomenology, but the way we understand how that transition must have been felt and why people operated with it in the specific way that they did. Furthermore, a phenomenological account must not only explain the dynamics of rational attitudes, but also how prerational intuition can mingle with active reflective ones, and finally, how active rational acts can slowly budge prerational ways of synthesizing basic passive

meaning (*e.g.* how the “idea” of a baroque perfection can release dormant seeds for an OCD type of disorder).

Those are aspects from which we can draw the conditions we were set out to find. Given the reasons, a phenomenological project of the vestimentary object: a) will not offer a cultural rollercoaster through a stunning plethora of vestimentary curiosities from European (or global) history; b) will not try to be a final close-circuit philosophical endeavor that offers an account of the universal “true essence” of fashion; c) will not create or hint at aesthetical ideologies or hierarchies concerning clothes and designers; d) will not avoid the subjective aspects concerning clothes and fashion, as it will not avoid such aspects from meaning-production in which clothes or fashion are involved. It will also not tell people how to dress.

An applied phenomenological project such as this one sets out to accomplish one or more of the following: a) to expose, reinterpret and clarify the way in which meaning and movement always intertwine in human experience; b) to clarify how this twofold structure works with the preliminary (usual) meanings that surround the objects aimed at by the interpreter and how the stratum of those preliminary meanings can be enriched through phenomenologically guided effort; c) to analyze particular ways in which the human body works with meaning and syntheses when confronted with vestimentary objects (as types of intentional objects) – in short, how does it feel when being conscious about clothes or clothes-related meanings (*e.g.* differences between Klein blue on silk and Klein blue on wool); d) to interpret a coherent, embodied, “vestimentary” attitude and its habitual protuberances, from what is uncovered at (c); e) to disclose ways in which vestimentary artefacts (even ideas derived from fashion) can influence basic, passive syntheses of the human body (*e.g.* how those tight Oxford shoes can modify my usual walking pattern and what meanings do I get to bear and suggest from that altered kinetic attitude).

Though Husserl never considered phenomenology as a useful way of inquiry for anything outside the forms of thought, not to mention the vestimentary body, much has changed. Biosemiotics and anthropology can offer valuable insights into how embodied consciousness works with its surrounding areas, and it would surely be philosophically attractive to see that a perceived covering blanket acts as a constructed surrounding area that dictates a certain attitude to that body. As the famous *noema-noesis*

conceptual couple is overshadowed by more refined phenomenological results, even by those Husserl produced in his late genetically dominated writings, it becomes clear that the father of phenomenology has distant siblings to be reckoned with. Most importantly, being an applied phenomenological project means that exegetical study will be secondary to phenomenological practice regarding vestimentary object and the correlated interpretation through writing.

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“SPEAKING SPEECH” AND PERSONAL IDENTITY¹

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Abstract

We often link personal identity to one's speech (*la parole*), referring to both the content and the nonverbal dimension. One of my first ways of access to the other is grasping the “texture” of his or her (re)enactment of language (where his or her body plays a central part). But how are we to think about language in order to retain its “texture” and not concentrate only on the abstract meaning of a word, a phrase or someone's speech? A phenomenology of language opens such a path by returning to the incarnate *speech* of the subject. This paper follows Maurice Merleau-Ponty's analysis of speech as expression and attempts to research the relation between what he calls “speaking speech” (*la parole parlante*) and one's profound identity.

Keywords: language, speech, expression, Merleau-Ponty, Borges, personal identity, phenomenology.

My proposal in the present paper is to think the rise and outlining of personal identity from *the phenomenon of speech (parole)*. Methodologically, as it is already manifest, I am assuming the *phenomenological* perspective on language. I shall begin by making a few historical and terminological remarks on what such a perspective presupposes.

Firstly, taking a phenomenological “stance” regarding language does not lead (anymore) to considering language from a “general” point of view, by focusing on universal and atemporal signifying structures, but,

¹ Some translations in the following text (from French and Romanian) belong to the author.

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on the contrary, such a stance replaces the focus on what I've called *speech* (*parole* following the saussurean terminology). In other words, a phenomenology of language has to come back "to spoken language, to my contact with the language I speak" (Merleau-Ponty 1953, 86). This is the definition that Henrik Pos proposes during the first international congress dedicated to phenomenology, that took place in 1951 in Bruxelles and this is also the definition that Merleau-Ponty maintains. Perhaps it is worth to mention in passing that we can find a sign of such (re)orientation towards language as it is spoken in Husserl's late writings. Here language ceases to be an object (of the universal and atemporal constituting consciousness) and the empirical dialects are "scrambled" or unclear realizations of an essential structure (traceable through the eidetic process). Instead, language becomes "an original manner to aim certain objects", "a body of thought", "an operation through which otherwise private thoughts gain an intersubjective value and, in the end, an ideal existence"; in the sense that they enter the "cultural circuit", they become "deposits" as Merleau-Ponty would say (84-5).

Therefore, "philosophical thinking that reflects on language would be from now the beneficiary of language, enveloped and situated in it." (85). In other words, in the phenomenological key, philosophical thought has to moderate the theoretical and therefore exterior attitude towards language, has to stop following the dream according to which an "universal language" is the one where it would find its accomplishment, as if the latter would be superior to the "natural" ones, filled with history and equivocal. Even taking this into consideration, I don't think we can find here a plea for the abandonment of any philosophy of language that would follow the path of concept and formalization, but one against an hierarchy between these formal studies and "natural" speech (a movement that analytical philosophy has made in the past century, beginning with the writings of the so-called Wittgenstein "two").

I. Speech and the Relation between Thought and Language

Returning to spoken language firstly means to reconsider the relation between thought and language: more precisely, it implies leaving the

(otherwise fictional) position of "pure" thinking, unsituated or "inner", "outside the world and outside of words" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 188) as Merleau-Ponty describes it, a thinking that would mysteriously be located "behind" our words. Philosophy has been holding such a claim as it has generally been concentrated on the concept, not the word itself. This focus is not wrong in itself or hard to legitimate, it is only unilateral and therefore incomplete. What it lacks is the actual experience of speech, as it is lived by the speaking subject (*le sujet parlant*). A phenomenology of language returns precisely to this experience.

Making a step further, it would be necessary to understand more clearly why is it that a return to spoken language leads to a reconsideration of the thought-language relation and how would such reconsideration look like - what other relation does thought have to language if it is no longer to be located "behind" it?

What the first phenomenological efforts of Merleau-Ponty brought to light following this return is *the expressive nature of speech*. Briefly, spoken language is expression. Not of "thoughts" or "ideal meanings" that float outside speech and precede it. Thinking itself is expressive. To picture this we might think of a writer that is about to begin a book - he does not know in advance what he will be writing all the way to the end of his work. Borges, for example, confesses that before writing a story all that he sees (! not *thinks*) are a beginning and an end, what will tie them will only afterwards reveal itself. Or we could think about our own experience, where we often find ourselves wanting to say something without knowing exactly what that is - after making an effort towards expressing ourselves we usually feel at ease and gain a clearer perspective on things. We clarify our minds as we speak and take distance from ourselves. Usually, we think while speaking and speak while thinking. As it is, „speech is not the "sign" of thought, if by this we understand a phenomenon that announces another as smoke announces fire. Speech and thought would only admit of this external relation if they were both thematically given; in fact, they are enveloped in each other; sense is caught in speech, and speech is the external existence of sense. We can no more admit, as is ordinarily done, that speech is a simple means of solidifying thought, or again, that it is the envelope or the clothing of thought." (187).

The arguments that Merleau-Ponty offers regarding the envelopment between speaking and thinking come from both the attentive observations made on the “normal” *experience* of expressing oneself and from taking into consideration certain speech pathologies. Following this last path it becomes manifest, for example, that there are cases in which patients “can read a text “expressively”, despite not understanding it” – a scenario that for the author points out that “speech or words carry a primary layer of signification that adheres to them and that gives the thought as a style, as an affective value, or as an existential mimicry, rather than as a conceptual statement.”(188). In other words, the meaning of a word or of a phrase irradiates towards us from its sonority as such and not only from knowing the linguistic conventions that a dictionary certifies it.

This “first layer of signification” is adherent to words in the sense that it depends on their corporality. Once we modify this corporality, the meaning of our uttered words and propositions will also change. For example, if we say “luna” instead of “moon” we can already hear a difference concerning what we might call the “emotional” or the “full” meaning of the word – following two of Merleau-Ponty’s expressions. Also, the same idea expressed by different choices of syntax, by different modulations and hesitations in voice bears full meanings that are also different. A simple pause between “I” and “love you” is enough to give a vulnerable or insecure colour to a confession.

One of the consequences of the expressive nature and implicit corporality of our spoken language is that neither isolated words, nor the utterances of a speaking subject can be formalized beyond any shortage. As a result, (i) poetry is not translatable, rigorously speaking (nor is prose, or journals, or any word from a certain language). Also, it is not an accident that on many occasions, in our experience in communicating with others, (ii) we often consider that it is as important to “read *between* the lines” as it is to follow what the other is saying explicitly – sometimes it is precisely “between” that we can find the true meaning of his words (a hidden proposal, a warning, an implicit interest). In the following section I will insist on these two ideas.

II. The Moon, Foreign Languages and the "Weight" of the Signifier

Borges believed that "each word is a poetical creation" (Borges 2010, 275) – "Let us think of something yellow, bright, changing, sometimes it's on the sky, being circular, other times it's shaped like a bow, sometimes it increases and decreases. Somebody – but we will never know his name –, our ancestor, our common ancestor, gave it the name "moon", different in different languages and sometimes happily picked, other times not quite. I would say that the Greek word *Selene* is too complex for the moon, that the English term *moon* has something mild, something that binds the voice to adopt a slowness that fits the moon, resembles her, because it is almost round and begins with a letter close to the one it ends with. The Spanish word *luna*, this beautiful word that we inherited from Latin, this beautiful word common with Italian, consists in two syllables, in two parts, which is, maybe, too much. We have *lua* in Portuguese, that seems less inspired; and *lune* in French that contains an idea of mystery." (274).

The differences in meaning seized so accurately here by Borges would be irrelevant for an intellectualist conception on language, for which the latter is only envelopment for thought – the concept of *moon* is the same in all languages mentioned above, but the moon gazed at as „selēnē" and the moon gazed at as "luna" are not the same... We could say in passing that in his dialogue *Cratylus*, Plato investigates indirectly which of all these *onoma* is "right" for the thing moon, which one imitates it better; but I will not develop here on the dialogue's evolution regarding the idea of imitating the thing "through voice (*phonē*)" or "through letters and syllables". It is significative to see only that for Plato also *the word itself*, similar or unsimilar to the thing, adequate or conventionally used, offers an indication, an elucidation (*delōo, endeiknumi*) of the thing itself and therefore transmits something, bears a meaning of its own.

The experience we have when approaching a foreign language speaks of the same meaningful corporality of the signifier, the word composed out of vowels and consonants: "when we study a language, when we are forced to see words up close, we feel them as being beautiful or not. While studying a language you see the words through a magnifying glass, you believe that one word is ugly, another beautiful, and another

ungraceful. This does not happen with our mother tongue, where words don't seem to us isolated from discourse." (276). This simple, but very philosophical remark, made by Borges, brings us suddenly in front of the following question: how is it possible that when we approach an altogether *foreign* language we however "feel" a signification coming from it? And what does "foreign" mean here? We can say that, for us, the language in question is still lacking its connections with the references outside it. We hear words but do not know what they mean, towards what do they "point" to. We are like prisoners *inside* that "foreign" language. As such, we are completely alert to something that we will afterwards forget: the sonority, the matter itself of the word. Heidegger saw beautifully in *Being and time* that we never hear "pure" sounds that we afterwards invest with a certain signification, but what we directly hear is "the wind", "the car" etc³. A similar thing occurs in our contact with a foreign language – the words say *something* to us, they are not "pure" and meaningless and by virtue of this certain something we judge them aesthetically. We cannot yet bring them together in a discourse, in the structure of "something as something", as we do not know what they mean, but we already have at hand "a first layer of signification" – the one adherent to the signifier.

Returning to the main course of this paper, we were saying that in speech (both regarding isolated words and somebody's utterances) the signifier is not irrelevant to the signified. This particularity brings speech close to *music* – here too the sounds are not separable from the meaning, rather they *are* the signification:

During the performance, the sounds are not merely the "signs" of the sonata; rather, the sonata is there through them and it descends into them. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 188)

³ "On the basis of this existentially primary potentiality for hearing, something like *hearkening* becomes possible. Harkening is itself phenomenally more primordial than what the psychologist 'initially' defines as hearing, the sensing of tones and the perception of sounds. Harkening, too, has the mode of being of a hearing that understands. 'Initially' we never hear noises and complexes of sounds, but the creaking wagon, the motorcycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the crackling fire." (Heidegger 2010, 158).

Regarding the speech we can observe that the signifier (the word itself with its vowels and consonants and someone's expression, with all the nonverbal aspects of it) has a meaning contribution, brings something to the conceptual or ideal signification of the uttered words. When we approach a philosophical or literary text, Merleau-Ponty remarks, before understanding "the ideas" sustained in it, we firstly understand or perceive a certain *style* of thinking – Spinozist, criticist, phenomenological etc. What we "perceive" here is precisely the signification immanent in speech⁴. By having such signification, any spoken utterance is like a *gesture* – both of them *contain their meaning*, they do not re-present it:

Speech is a genuine gesture and, just like all gestures, speech too contains its own sense. This is what makes communication possible. In order for me to understand the other person's words, I must "already know" his vocabulary and his syntax. But that does not mean that the words act by arousing "representations" in me, which could be associated with them and which, when taken together, could eventually reproduce in me the speaker's original "representation." I do not primarily communicate with "representations" or with a thought, but rather with a speaking subject, with a certain style of being, and with the "world" that he aims at. Just as the meaningful intention that initiated the other person's speech is not an explicit thought, but rather a certain lack that seeks to be fulfilled, so too is my taking up of this intention not an operation of my thought, but rather a synchronic modulation of my own existence, a transformation of my being. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 189)

The suggestion of seeing spoken language as a gesture is one of Merleau-Ponty's main thesis and maybe amongst the most provocative

⁴ "Here, then, the sense of words must ultimately be induced by the words themselves, or more precisely their conceptual signification must be formed by drawing from a gestural signification, which itself is immanent in speech. And just as, when in a foreign country, I begin to understand the sense of words by their place in a context of action and by participating in everyday life, so too a philosophical text that remains poorly understood nevertheless reveals to me at least a certain 'style' – whether Spinozistic, critical, or phenomenological – which is the first sketch of its sense. I begin to understand a philosophy by slipping into this thought's particular manner of existing, by reproducing the tone or the accent of the philosopher in question." (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 184-185).

for our common understanding. His idea implies understanding the phenomenon of communication in a different manner, without an appeal to semiotics or pure mental (re)construction of the meaning of the words coming from the other. We do not trade representations while speaking to each other. Rather, we “synchronize” our existences; we understand each other from inside. And in order to do so we had already fully consented to the “spectacle” of the other:

The sense of the gestures is not given but rather understood, which is to say taken up by an act of the spectator (...) I engage myself with my body among things, they coexist with me insofar as I am an embodied subject, and this life among things has nothing in common with the construction of scientific objects. Similarly, I do not understand the other person’s gestures through an act of intellectual interpretation; the communication between consciousnesses is not grounded upon the shared sense of their experiences, rather it grounds them in turn. The movement by which I lend myself to the spectacle must be recognized as irreducible. I join with it in a sort of blind recognition that precedes the definition or intellectual elaboration of the sense. Generation after generation “understand” and accomplish the sexual gestures, such as the caress, prior to the philosopher defining their intellectual signification (...) I understand the other person through my body, just as I perceive “things” through my body. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 190-92)

In the first instance the act of understanding does not function through concordant “representations” or through interpretation, but through a sort of a repetition *in* myself of the signification immanent in the other’s speech; in other words, through a “synchronic modulation of my own existence, a transformation of my being”. When I understand a text, for example, both in me as reader and in the writer a new “sense organ” will have been created, a new “field” will have opened in us (188). All these “metaphors” simply point out to the fact that understanding happens from the inside and not from the exterior, through “representations”. The meaning of my spoken words, of my self-expression is not the sum of all the expressive values of the elements that composed it, but rather all these “signs” send also towards an always “suspended” signification, which is never properly contained in words but in the “texture” of our linguistic gesture, in the modulations of my voice, in the choice of words and their order etc. Any expression therefore appears to me as a trace (*trace*), I can never grab the “thinking that inhabits speaking” (even

though this formulation is imprecise given the simultaneity of the two "processes"), at least not without any residuum.

Resuming, up to this point we saw that (i) speech as expression does not have its meaning outside, it is not preceded by thought and that (ii) there exists an immanent signification in the act of speaking – a certain "weight" of the signifier (whether we are referring to the sonority of an isolated word, or to the entire corporality that accompanies the expressions of a speaking subject). But we have not "descended" all the way so to speak; our observations are still incomplete – we have not yet arrived in the vicinity of the intentionality "behind" speech, of that first "meaningful intention". In other words, we have not yet reached the very being of speaking. Further steps are therefore still required.

III. The Intentionality of Speech. "Speaking Speech" and "Spoken Speech"

For Merleau-Ponty spoken language is therefore expression. But such an understanding contradicts both the naturalist or physiologist and the intellectualist conceptions on the nature of language itself (both reduce the latter to something else – physiological processes or thinking). As mentioned above, one of the arguments that Merleau-Ponty presents (in the *Phenomenology of perception*) for these conceptions' failure to catch the specificity of language comes from different studies made on speech pathologies – the Schneider case, for example. This is the case of a patient for whom nothing concerning the physiology corresponding to speaking or the intellect is affected but whose language *is* however altered – "We will have the opportunity to see this essential power of speech in cases in which neither thought nor motricity are perceptibly affected, and yet in which the "life" of language is altered." (201). More precisely, Schneider speaks only when questioned and if he had previously prepared his answer. Phrases which are only possible and false statements seem meaningless to him: he "never feels the need to speak, his experience never tends toward speech, it never raises a question, and it never ceases to have this sort of evidence and

self-sufficiency of the real that stifles all interrogation, all reference to the possible, all wonder, and all improvisation.” (202). (We could say he is a sort of a Borgesian Funes, locked in the present and the concrete).

The phenomenological or philosophical interpretation that Merleau-Ponty brings out from taking into consideration this pathological case in which a person doesn't prove an autonomous intention to speak takes us closer to the essence of spoken language:

By contrast, we catch sight of the essence of normal language: the intention to speak can only be found in an open experience: it appears, as boiling appears in a liquid, when, in the thickness of being, empty zones are constituted and move outward. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 202)

In other words, it looks like what Schneider misses is the “open experience” of the world that would have triggered the intention to speak out and that would have characterized him as “*ek-sistence*”.

But let us stop for a moment on the cited passage. Merleau-Ponty uses here a striking image (analogy?) – that of the boiling liquid. How can we interpret it in order to better seize the phenomenon of speech? I believe that, according to this image, the intentionality behind language is disclosed as being fired by the occurrence (spontaneous as all occurrence or appearance) of a certain *discontinuity* – marked by those “empty zones” (*zones de vide*) constituted “in the thickness” or density⁵ of natural being (we could note in passing that this *thickness* seems to come precisely from the “open experience” of the world). Therefore, the phenomenon of speech hides a beautiful double paradox: on one side, it rises out of a form of *density* and depth but as *void* and, on the other hand, although it springs from void and *depth* it takes an excessive manifestation and is oriented towards the *exterior*, therefore the surface.

But what kind of a speaking is the one coming from void and oriented towards the exterior? Ordinary we move inside a world where language and communication go without... saying. We are not surprised

⁵ The French term “l'épaisseur” can be translated by “thickness”, “density”, “depth” or “opacity” – as in *L'épaisseur du brouillard*, “the density of the mist”.

by either of them: neither by the occurrence that there is something like *speaking*, nor by the fact that we understand each other by *communicating*:

We live in a world where speech is already instituted. We possess in ourselves already formed significations for all of these banal words [paroles]. They only give rise in us to second-order thoughts, which are in turn translated into other words that require no genuine effort of expression from us, and that will demand no effort of comprehension from our listeners. Thus, language and the comprehension of language seem self-evident. (...) It is, however, clear that constituted speech, such as it plays out in everyday life, assumes that the decisive step of expression has been accomplished. Our view of man will remain superficial so long as we do not return to this origin, so long as we do not rediscover the primordial silence beneath the noise of words, and so long as we do not describe the gesture that breaks this silence. Speech is a gesture, and its signification is a world. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 189-190)

I believe we can easily understand these dense observations of Merleau-Ponty: we move within a world of "well known" and dull meanings; we explain words using other words; we take for granted that which made these sense acquisitions possible, including the history of our own language but especially its perpetual *origin*. This origin is an *act of expression*⁶, *i.e.* a gesture. The analysis of this act has already revealed a certain weaving between signified and signifier but hasn't yet clarified what it is that triggers it in the beginning. We have not yet described the opening gesture of speaking that breaks with silence; we have not yet "descended" all the way. What rests inside this gesture is on the one hand the very origin thus essence of language and the inner look of any moment when a human being truly expresses something – the first words of a child or the pages where a writer tries to follow with the aid of pen and paper what he saw only vaguely in the first instance.

In the passage cited above we could discern two kinds of speaking: one gestural, expressive and the other constituted, instituted. Merleau-Ponty attests this same distinction using the notions of *speaking speech* (*la parole parlante*) and *spoken speech* (*la parole parlée*):

⁶ To be sure, the act of expression presupposes both a moment of passivity (a boiling, a rise) and a moment of activity (the grounding of that first original meaningful intention within the body of the language we inherited).

In the former, the meaningful intention is in a nascent state. Here existence is polarized into a certain “sense” that cannot be defined by any natural object; existence seeks to meet up with itself beyond being, and this is why it creates speech as the empirical support of its own non-being. Speech is the excess of our existence beyond natural being. But the act of expression constitutes a linguistic and cultural world, it makes that which stretched beyond fall back into being. This results in spoken speech, which enjoys the use of available significations like that of an acquired fortune. From these acquisitions, other authentic acts of expression – those of the writer, the artist, and the philosopher – become possible. This ever-recreated opening in the fullness of being is what conditions the first speech of the child and the speech of the writer, the construction of the word and the construction of concepts. Such is the function revealed through language, which reiterates itself, depends upon itself, or that like a wave gathers itself together and steadies itself in order to once again throw itself beyond itself. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 202-03)

In this passage cited *ad extenso* we again find the resemblance between the act of speech and the boiling of a liquid: the meaningful initial intention is like an “empty zone” (*zone de vide*), one of discontinuity, that tries to reach out in the open, “beyond being”, beyond the natural object itself and beyond what we naturally have at hand (Merleau-Ponty insists in the previous passage upon the relation between being and “natural”).

The initial meaningful intention, *missing* words into which to deploy itself, creates them out of an *overflow* of sense or meaning. The latter cannot be caught in some natural object, cannot be expressed neither by pointing with the finger or imitating, nor by speaking the words of others. It is more than them. Speaking is an excess of our *existence* upon the natural *being* (and afterwards upon the already available significations). A double *ex-cess* to be more precise: firstly that of the meaningful intention that aims at a sense that exceeds its object, and secondly one belonging to the act of ex-pression as such. Merleau-Ponty also uses another word for this excess – “miracle”. The idea of transcendence is evidently already on the tip of our tongue. What else could that mysterious first meaningful intention of the first man ever to speak, of the child who pronounces a first word or of the writer who sits down almost ignorant at his writing table be if not an act of self-

transcendence? "[L]ike a wave gathers itself together and steadies itself in order to once again throw itself beyond itself."...

In order to understand the essence of speech it is necessary to understand, *i.e.* to be able to stop in the proximity of this *meaningful intention*, of this "empty zone" that suddenly appears in the midst of our natural being. Somehow, man speaks because he cannot remain silent any longer. But what does this mean, isn't it a commonplace? Perhaps not. The meaningful intention "(...) is not an explicit thought, but rather a certain lack that seeks to be fulfilled" (189). Or: "The meaningful intention in me (...) isn't in the moment, and even if it has to be productive afterwards in terms of 'thoughts' – but a determined void (*vide déterminé*) to be filled by words (*à combler par de mots*) –, the excess of what I want to say on what is or has been already said." (Merleau-Ponty 1953, 95). Let us again remember those moments when we want to say something, but do not know exactly what it is. After expressing ourselves our own words end up by surprising us. When we truly express something, everything springs from a vague or "confused" intention (if we measure it in relation to thought), from a *silent* and unthought "area". Speech comes from "lack" and silence.

This fact of the "empty" intention that suddenly triggers speech has three linked consequences (95-96):

1) Merleau-Ponty insists in referring to the "area" (*zone*) where it originates as being "void" and "lacunar". I believe that a closer text analysis would show that these words point to the fact that this "area" cannot be given thematically as it does not have what we would call "a content". The signification that animates my speech and that I wish to express cannot be themed or represented as such – it animates speech just as the world animates the body, implicitly⁷. The signification of my speech or of the other's circulates and magnetizes our expressions but it is never wholly contained in them. It remains only a *pole* towards which all of my expressive efforts converge.

⁷ I will not develop here on the relation between corporeal intentionality and speech, as this would mean to extensively approach corporeal intentionality as such.

Which means that 2) these expressions are irreparably *incomplete* (93) [even if as native speakers of a mother tongue we never sense this incompleteness: “The man I love” is for an English person an expression just as complete as „l’homme *que j’aime*” is for a French one. Each of them under-stands something in their expressions, they say more than what they say by their mere allegiance to the structure of a language (*langue*) (95)]. The fundamental characteristic of expression is precisely the „excess of the signifier upon the signified” and therefore the incompleteness of the expression (one that we otherwise comprehend perfectly, as it is not incomplete in the sense that it hardens our communication, but in the sense that the very nature of the signifier renders the excess of the signified possible).

3) But, if the signified is not themed before speech, it is because the signified is actually its *result*:

To express, for the speaking subject, is to become aware; he doesn’t express only for the others, he expresses in order to know himself that which he aims for. (96)

For us, the speaking subjects, the *act* of expression is not a secondary operation which we would not use except in order to communicate our thoughts to another, it is rather the taking into possession, the acquiring of significations that would otherwise be present to us only in a vague and mute manner. In other words, expression leads to an elucidation of our own thinking, to its discovery, to anchoring of a new signification in the depth of our being. This signification gets incarnated by the handling of already available meaning, it is the work of “I can”, and not of “I think”. All three considerations (the signification that cannot be given thematically, the ever incomplete expression and the signified result of speech and not its antecedent) can be systematized in the following expression: we always simultaneously say *more* and *less* than what we actually say (“more” because we discover ourselves and “less” because the (self)discovery is always reiterated – just like the hermeneutic

circle in which Dasein goes deeper in itself as it is understanding that has itself as its concern⁸).

Further, once triggered, the meaningful intention at the beginning vague and void "gives itself a body", it auto-objectifies itself (if we may use this expression) by passing through the medium of the language and culture into which I, the speaking subject situate myself and whose *inheritor* I am:

The meaningful intention gives itself a body and knows itself by searching for an equivalent⁹ in the system of already available significations that represent the language I speak and the aggregate of writings and culture whose inheritor I am. (Merleau-Ponty 1953, 97)

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- ⁸ "The 'circle' in understanding belongs to the structure of meaning, and this phenomenon is rooted in the existential constitution of Dasein, that is, in interpretive understanding. Beings which, as being-in-the-world, are concerned about their being itself have an ontological structure of the circle. However, if we note that the 'circle' belongs ontologically to a kind of being of objective presence (subsistence), we shall in general have to avoid characterizing something like Dasein ontologically in terms of this phenomenon." (Heidegger 2010, 148-149).
- ⁹ How precisely does this "search for an equivalent" occur since the meaningful intention is initially void ("empty"), mute? How does it know what it searches for and how does it acknowledge when it found an equivalent if it lacks any accurateness? What sort of a "search" is this? It is not the case that we have in one hand the "lack" and that I try to acquire in the other the "adequate piece" to "fill" it. I am not handling a puzzle, but rather I am handled by an inner and mute force (?) – the one to which Merleau-Ponty alludes using the analogy between the act of speech and the boiling of some liquid. Maybe the expressions "vague" and "determinate void" suggest a clue on the manner in which this re-cognition or acknowledgement happens: there exists an *active* meaning, even if not formulated into words. We could note in passing that the megaric paradox was similar to the one here. We can find it formulated in the dialogue Meno 80d-e: "*Meno*: How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know? *Socrates*: I know what you want to say, Meno. Do you realize what a debater's argument you are bringing up, that a man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know? He cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search—nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for." (Plato 1997, 880).

Never does a writer or an artist create except by reshaping the already available in which we all act¹⁰. I am another for myself when I express something clear¹¹ since I discover myself through words and a syntax that precede me. But in the absence of this inheritance I would only remain the depository of a void and lacunar meaningful intention, of a lack. The rearranging of this inheritance is the mark of authentic expression (what André Malraux named „déformation cohérente” (99), deformation that simultaneously produces a new meaning):

Being different from language, speech is this moment in which the meaningful intention still mute and while in act (tout en acte) proves to be able to incorporate itself in culture, mine and that of the other, to form me and to form him by transforming the meaning of cultural instruments. (100)

IV. Brief Conclusion

In the phenomenological perspective (mainly that of Merleau-Ponty), speech and thought are expression, corporeal and need to be understood in terms of “work in progress”. If we link *personal identity* to *speech* as the expression of an incarnated subject and to a void *intention* that animates it then the former will appear as *implicit*: (i) firstly, it will be manifest within the significations that always form a *trace* in somebody’s speech, like a texture of his or her linguistic gesture; (ii) it cannot be represented as such, it springs from “I can” rather than from “I think”, it is manifest in that pole that magnetizes the discourse, in that meaningful intention that is both excessive and void. Therefore, it is not a “compact”, linear identity of the sort A=A anywhere and anytime, but rather an identity that can only be fore-seen, marked by discontinuities in a kind of a perpetual back and forth between a deep, dense dimension of

¹⁰ “I understand or I believe I understand the words and the forms of French language; I have some experience of the literary and philosophical modes of expression that the given culture offers me. I express when, by using all these already speaking instruments, I make them say something they have never said before.” (99).

¹¹ “Insofar as what I say has a meaning, I am for myself, when I speak, another ‘other’ and, insofar as I understand, I no longer know who speaks and who listens.” (107).

our natural and immersed in the world and culture being and an ascending dimension that is explosive, ex-pressive, (re)organizing.

Just as for Merleau-Ponty speech is rooted in the spontaneity of the meaningful intention and in the system of available significations I would say that personal identity is also nourished by the same two sources: one spontaneous and the other situational. Someone's identity isn't of course synonymous with his or her speaking, but with the sum of his or her expressivity (which on many occasions elides words – for example, in all that pertains to the manifestation of a certain corporeal style, or of moral and aesthetic choices where the mysterious bind our existing being has with nonexistent ideals becomes transparent). However, the description of the phenomenon of speech can bring to light the fact that someone's identity must not be traced back to an area "behind" words where his or her thinking would rest clearly and lucidly coagulated, even if not yet formulated. If there is a "hard core" it is the "open experience" and not some thinking or some intellect that ordines this experience. We are "acting" on a stage without curtain. The conception on the "human being" that Merleau-Ponty constantly confronts, following Heidegger, is of course the substantialist one (even if it is yet to investigate if such polemic doesn't have as starting point an artifice like the "straw man"; the question of true fidelity to the criticized tradition remains opened).

Nevertheless, beyond any background polemic, the French author has truly seized facts of our experience and has indeed followed the necessary road "back to the things themselves". Concerning speech, this road had as a task to dislocate both intellectualist and materialist preconceptions about language, in order to make way for concrete speaking. The phenomenon of such speaking, once recuperated, replaces us in the possession of certain modes of being that are proper to us (the void intentionality from which speech springs, expressivity and its fundamental incompleteness and excess, self-knowledge as dependent as it is on tradition, the corporality of words and of speech in general, our captivity in an instituted speech and, especially the mystery or "miracle" of the act of speaking itself).

Identity, therefore, appears as a self-discovery (an obvious paradoxical statement) within and throughout the language we speak; only from this

situation can we discern and express our bond with the world, *our* way of living it, a bond that is defining for us as incarnated subjects. Also, in closing, I would dare to add that our identity truly exists as long as we live and act within the *speaking speech* and not in the spoken, instituted speech. Speaking and identity are both “excesses of our existence upon our natural being” and upon cultural sediments. The signature is always found in the corner of the painting, not in its middle.

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**A PERSON IMAGINES FORGIVING A SUBJECT.
THREE PERSPECTIVES ON THE REST OF FORGIVING,
FOLLOWING JANKÉLÉVITCH, DERRIDA AND LEVINAS:
THE UNPARDONABLE OF THE IPSEITY, “OUTSIDE THE SUBJECT”**

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the relation between possibility and potentiality that exists in forgiving the Other's death, following Jankélévitch's philosophical assumptions, which claims that the Subject's quality is changing depending on different moral roles and values that the Person takes in exercising the forgiveness itself. Therefore, I will evaluate to what extent, approaching the death of a Subject through the forgiveness that its author received from the Other, will prove to be a deconstruction of the Subject constructed through three possible identities of the Person, discussed by Jankélévitch as moral perspectives of *the first (I)*, *the second (You)* and *the third Person (the Other)*.

In the first part of the article, I will investigate the difference between pardonable and unpardonable that Jankélévitch discusses in *Forgiveness*. The working hypothesis is that the passing from the imprescriptible of the *Forgiveness* to the open interrogation, *Should We Pardon Them?* is caused by the recourse to a hermeneutical approach that presents the Other's death unforgettable for the moral experience of the I. I have submitted this interpretation to a strategic formula, called *the death on the third Person and the forgiveness on the first Person*, a proper description for the only possible case that he admits as an authentic forgiveness, in which “the I” forgives the Other's death caused by someone else. In the second part of the article I will closely observe the consequences of his perspective on the intimate connection between the experience of death and the phenomenon of forgiveness in Derrida's philosophy, whose position I will recognise through the expression of *the death on the first Person and the forgiveness on the first Person* (defining that only I can forgive for anything caused to my person), as well as in

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Levinas' philosophy, whose critical treatment I will synthesize through the expression of *the death on the second Person and the forgiveness on the first Person*. As a practical research, this article will conclude different manners to understand the Auschwitz's phenomena through forgiveness, following Jankélévitch's, Derrida's and Levinas' analysis on this subject, from both moral and metaphysical perspective.

Keywords: forgiveness, death, pardonable, unpardonable, moral values, the Other, Person, Auschwitz.

I. Theoretical Presuppositions and Main Stakes

"Each of us is the first who dies"² (Ionesco³ 1978). This simple statement is a way to recognize the individual formula of the Subject's renouncing to the appearance of a plural Person: assumed under these terms, death is enunciated only as a metaphysical rest. If the partisanship with Jankélévitch's statement is accepted, claiming that ethics is constituted by a moral register, than, the Subject's finitude is regarded as a personal death, one that, when is caused by another, considers the otherness relation being part of the forgiveness phenomena. In the postmodern discourse, collective disappearance through death as a paradigmatic relation of Man-against-Man is defined as a meta-empirical tragedy, as Jankélévitch nominates the Auschwitz historical process. Hence, it is not a conventional critical treatment to consider this kind of moral discourse a potential source for the deconstruction of the postmodern Subject, one that privileges the Person's value despite the Subject's one, since it is the only one which expresses the authentic experience of death and forgiveness making recourse to three different instances of the otherness: I, You and The Other⁴.

² "Tout le monde est le premier à mourir".

³ Jankélévitch himself quotes Ionesco in his philosophical analysis conceived in *La Mort*.

⁴ Jankélévitch is using the first three pronominal persons to distinguish three main perspectives belonging to the Subject and presented as its hypostasis: the first person, being the I, the second person, understood as You and often recognized in his writings by an alternative name, the Thou, and the third person, remarked as The Other, consecrated lately in Buber's or Levinas' philosophy. What I want to state from the very beginning is the fact that in my analysis, I prefer to refer to any of these persons in their metaphysical and moral quality; hence, receiving the

Conceived as a research of Jankélévitch's moral philosophy and metaphysics, this article aims to present the consequences of his perspective on the intimate connection between death's experience and the phenomena of forgiveness presented in Derrida's and Levinas' oeuvre. Through this critical treatment, I also intend to create a proper context to analyse the relation between Subject and Person. Therefore, I will evaluate to what extent, approaching the death of a Subject through the forgiveness that its author received from an Other, proves being, in fact, a construction process of three possible identities of the Person, discussed by Jankélévitch as three different perspectives:

The third and the second Person are my points of view on the Other (He or You) or the points of view of the Other on me (I, considered as second or third person of the Other), the two partners remaining two subjects distinguished one from the other both monadic and personal: the first person, who represents my point of view on my one, yours on your one and, generally, the reflexive point of view of anyone on itself. (Jankélévitch 1977)

In consequence, treating the acceptance of death as an ethical event and forgiveness as a process, but associating the first one with the idea of *instance* and the second one with the significance of an *interval*, in the first section of this research I will analyse the consequences of the relation *possible-impossible*, as it appears in Jankélévitch's philosophy, on defining the condition of forgiveness expressed in Derrida's philosophical work as a genuine distance between the pure forgiveness and *the unpardonable*. According to Jankélévitch, any discourse about a potential forgiveness is based on forgiving one Person for something wrong caused to another Person – is the formula defined, with boldness, as the death in the third Person and the forgiveness in the first Person, an expression that contextually is very generous, allowing to the French philosopher to insert the difference between possibility and potentiality in any act of forgiveness.

Keeping the correspondence between giving a suitable expression to a Person's formula and conceiving a philosophical argument for it in

same critical treatment as the Subject does, the Person will be referred to, during this analysis, using capital letters.

terms of forgiveness, I will evaluate Derrida's critique addressed to the hyperbolic ethics of Jankélévitch, as it is named by its author, discussing Derrida's perspective as an adjusted opinion to the death in the first Person and to the forgiveness in the first Person, in the sense of the I's or the Ego's forgiveness for what was done wrong against it. Nevertheless, a significant shift of paradigm is represented, starting from Jankélévitch's argument, by the context in which an I must forgive a second Person for something committed to a third- thus, the interval from the death in the second Person to the forgiveness in the first Person, claimed by Levinas, becomes a suitable critic to Jankélévitch's argument about forgiveness. Levinas assumes that this kind of relation leaves as a rest remaining outside a Subject that is placed, paraphrasing one of the author's titles, between *Totality and Infinity*.

II. Death in the Second Person, Forgiveness in the First Person: The Morality of the Instance and the Aesthetics of the Interval. Jankélévitch on Possibility and Potentiality of Forgiveness

Apparently, Jankélévitch's position consolidates an authentic paradox: if in *Forgiveness* the unpardonable as form of the absolute evil, assimilated as a metaphysical category, must be absolved of any gravity, in 1971, to the impersonal interrogation *Should We Pardon Them?*⁵, addressed by Hebrews to the Nazis, Jankélévitch answers by justifying the unpardonable⁶. The moral tension occurred between the pardonable and the unpardonable exceeds the uncertain inconsistencies of the synthesis, of the burdened consciousness of the Subject and of any

⁵ I will consider Jankélévitch's position from his article published in 1996, "Should We Pardon Them?".

⁶ Significantly is, at first glance, the manner in which Jankélévitch is constructing his philosophical argument, making recourse to the time's forgiveness, a problem that I will discuss in a further section of this article: "It is time to pardon, or at least to forget? Twenty years are enough, it would seem, for the unpardonable to become miraculously pardonable: by right and from one day to the next the unforgettable is forgotten" (Jankélévitch 1996, 553).

sanction applied to remind the total commitment of the Person through the formula of the ethical maximalism, all this mentions being proceeded aspects in *Le Paradoxe de la Morale*.

Consequently, from these assumptions, the following question might be derived: is the unpardonable a simulacrum for the moral refuse understood as denial? Moreover, is forgiveness's negation implying the abolishment of The Other as an Identity, placing its representation *outside the Subject*, as Levinas said?

On the one hand, I consider that the difference between *pardonable* and *unpardonable* is assimilated by the relation possible-impossible developed by any act of forgiveness. This distance is caused not by the contrasts of death's experience, distinctly resented from the religious and metaphysical context to the bio-politic and moral accents, but by the manner in which Jankélévitch prefers to explain the plausibility of forgiveness and its impossibility through the Subject's value both as an interval and as an instance.

Jankélévitch distinguishes *the instance*, as an ethical event allowing to understand forgiveness as a personal relation of the Subject with an Other defined as Person, from *the interval*, as a proper dimension for the Subject's ethical virtues that accomodate it with its finitude through self-forgiveness and preparation for death. The impossibility is affirmed at the instance's level. The Subject, in its evolution, is exposed as Person, each time being surprised in rising in interval in which the virtues, under the exercise of what Foucault recognised being practices of the self, develops, in time, the I meant to live, love and forgive, events presented as possible to happen only in one *instance*. Hence, forgiveness is instantaneous, interpersonal, implicitly receiving the otherness in any reconciliation phenomena, constituted into *an interval*, since it needs time. Anything that forgiveness assumes from outside the Subject is placed outside the legal codes and integrated into a moral of Person.

On the other hand, the overtones of this interpretation are more subtle. Jankélévitch was associating the tragic⁷, in *Le Paradoxe de la*

⁷ "Between the anonymity of the third person and the tragic subjectivity of the first person [...]; between the death of the other, which is far away and indifferent,

Morale exclusively to the consciousness's forms of existence. In this manner, if we constantly assume the symmetry and the consubstantiality between forgiveness and love, any unpardonable represents a construct opposed to love, involving a minimum ontic level and a minimum ethical level: since not the smallest evil was committed, but the extreme one, the unpardonable is the only possible under these circumstances. The risk of not instituting the unpardonable would imply the possibility to reject the Person's value and the double approximation of the moral refusal, described by the French philosopher as a process in two steps. Firstly, it is mentioned as a possibility to assert evil as good, evil that is not only excluded from any form of unpardonable, but it is also defined as source of a confusion of absolute moral values⁸. Secondly, it is approximated as a vector for a bad will, potentially assumed as a rhetorical effect or, in the worst case, as the minimum evil or a necessary one⁹. Therefore, I consider that the unpardonable, defined by Jankélévitch as possibility, is nothing else than a simple denial. Or, to be more specific, a moral denial¹⁰.

II.1. A Person Imagines Forgiving a Subject

Beyond these aspects, researching the significances that Jankélévitch gave to forgiveness assumed as a moral construct postulated between interval and instance, from where derives its species – the unpardonable

and one's own death, that touches our own being, there is the nearness of the near" (Jankélévitch 1977, 29).

- ⁸ "The conflict of values exists simultaneously in itself and in the bad will of the man" (To be consulted, on this concerning, Jankélévitch 2005, 13-56).
- ⁹ Jankélévitch continues arguing that "the good is that thing which one responds to affirmatively, and, if it is responded negatively, it means that the so-called good is a disguised evil".
- ¹⁰ Apparently, this would be the third type of moral refusal that Jankélévitch processes, although initially there were discussed only two forms of denial: the 1st refusal, a denial of supernaturalistic morals, in which repression, imaginary and suppression of immoral desires are developing and the 2nd refusal, which is taken as refusing the refusal of idealistic morality, developing an ascetical ambivalence. What Jankélévitch claims from the outset is that morality is essentially refusal, even though any refusal is not necessarily moral.

and the impossibility to forgive –, I consider that a suitable explanation for Jankélévitch's change of perspective from the imprescriptible of the *Forgiveness* to the relaxed discourse of "Should We Forgive Them?" might be represented by a hermeneutical approach that makes the Other's death unforgivable for the moral experience of the I. It is what I called, in creating an adequate order for the three authoritarian figures for writing about forgiveness – Jankélévitch, Derrida and Levinas – the sequence surprising death at the third Person and forgiveness at the first Person. This is the moral equation through which I think that Jankélévitch develops his theory about the unpardonable.

Through death in the third Person, the I as a Subject understands the Other's identity in a paradoxical sense of the abstract and anonymous death, one that reflects the potentiality of its own death, even if it is approached impersonally and conceptually. Although "the third Person is a principle of serenity, of distance"¹¹, of instituting a hermeneutical neutrality, the first Person is certainly a source of anguish. Between death at the third Person and forgiveness at first Person, the consciences are authentically communicating, the Subject's identity representing the finitude of the first one through the finitude of the second one. In this manner, one can regard the Other's death as his one. The Other, even if it is not regarded as a Person, remains a Subject and, in the name of its identity the unpardonable appears:

This point of view, that is barely constituted as a point of view, because it renounces at perspective and optical distance, represents, in fact, the lived experience of one's own death, in which the object of the consciousness and the Subject of "to dye" coincide. (Jankélévitch 1977)

Time develops all the moral possibilities, both positive and negative, playing the role of a neutral construct in producing forgiveness: time cannot forgive. This is the manner in which the chances of the pseudo-forgiveness start, being, *de facto*, conflicts of representation. The forgiveness of any action morally convictable by a

¹¹ In the absence of a published English translation of Jankelevitch's volume, *La mort* (1977), all the further quotes from this oeuvre represent my own translations.

moral consciousness, without thinking and also forgiving its consequences represents, according to Jankélévitch, a defensive mechanism of the Subject that is not assumed, in this case, as a Person. The absence of the integrated consequences, as well as the recourse to the temporality of forgiveness is privileging the development of a failed act of the absolution of the sins, called pseudo-forgiveness, in which, even if the unpardonable is excluded, the possibility of forgiveness is kept. Apart from temporising and integration, Jankélévitch is criticizing a third form of the fallible representation of the forgiveness, and that is the intellectualisation process, regarded as an operational sense donation for a evil-disposed act in a different context. The intellectualisation is based on different speculations of the moral negative action: in consequence, it cannot be assumed as an instance, since it supports exculpation by reconciliation and excuse, and not by forgiveness. Not least, the depersonalisation of forgiveness is called liquidation, meaning overlooking One's mistake to Another. The simple omission means avoiding an inter-Personal relation. Otherwise, at this level, a Person imagines forgiving a Subject.

Inconsistencies of this argument appear, following Jankélévitch's theories about forgiveness order, in the final assumption expressed in his treatise: "when a murder can neither be justified, nor explained, nor even understood, when, with everything that could be explained having been explained, the atrocity of this crime and the overwhelming evidence of this responsibility are obvious, then, there is nothing left to do besides forgiving" (Jankélévitch 2005, 106). What I found relevant is the association of this mention with the previous statements, generating together an absolute form of the unpardonable: because forgiveness is absolute, than, the unpardonable is deconstructed and annulled. I certify, for the moment, the importance of placing both Absolute Evil and Absolute Good on the same horizon of possibility:

Both, in a sense, occur "outside" the realm of normative ethics. They both take place in the instant, as an exception to the regular order. As soon as forgiveness is accomplished, Evil could appear again, and vice versa: "Love is stronger than evil and evil is stronger than love; each is stronger than the other!" (Jankélévitch 2005, 164). In the event of forgiveness, one sees the Good appear, but this Good is impermanent, and Evil can always appears on the horizon, and indeed must

remain there, if there is to be anything called forgiveness. Forgiveness is impossible or nearly impossible in this conceptualization. But this is the aporia, or impossibility, which in Jankélévitch's argument will always haunt forgiveness. (Lupo 2010, 26)

II.2. Forgiving the Fact-of-Having-Been-Made. A Self Expressed by Person, Not by an Idem

Later, in his essay dedicated to the concentration camps, Jankélévitch expressed the ontological void through the disappearance of the hominism. Hence, "forgiveness died in the concentration camps" (Jankélévitch 1996, 556), being no other difficult moral image that a moral consciousness must imagine. Why forgiveness become, at this level, utopic, and moreover, what kind of representation is addressed to the Subject's identity if it remains only a chimera? I consider that the proper answer is offered by the same logic of Jankélévitch's argument: if the forgiveness belongs to the instance, not to the interval, than, it must be assumed exclusively as an interpersonal relation, from monad to monad, from Subject to Subject, only in this way being transferable from Person to Person. In other words, it is possible to asses that a Jew forgives a Nazi, but it is impossible that universalising, one might assert that all the Jews forgave all the Nazis. The unpardonable's possibility is given by the impossibility of both the singular and the inter-personal. The death in the third Person and the forgiveness in the first Person are possible only into a relationship between an I and a Him: this is the forgiveness whose manifested power is expressed only between two persons, being the exercise of one regarding to the other's face. Here, Derrida imposes the universalisation of the impossible forgiveness, not the universalisation of the unpardonable, taking into account a collective Subject, like Jankélévitch does. I will return to this issue in the course of the two sections of the article.

What I want to lay on, however, is a significant aspect that seems to have escaped from the rigorist and classic exegesis dedicated to Jankélévitch's texts. I have never met and read a critical argument associating the Auschwitz' process to the instance, and not to the interval. Most of the critics assumed the ethical perspective that

Jankélévitch addressed to this historical event as a critical treatment applied to a mechanism developed in time, but implicitly considered as an interval. But, analysing the manner in which the French philosopher understands the instance as an ethical event, we might obtain a new approach, one that is not leaving the inter-Personal relations outside the Subject: if genocide is an instance, a personal relationship defined as an unjustified report of Man-against-Man, and if forgiveness is assumable only by a Person reporting to Another, than, it is clear why each Subject can forgive exclusively the mistakes committed to itself, not having the right to solve, forget and forgive injustices, crimes and atrocities against other Persons.

The Person is a product of the moral intimacy, the problem of forgiveness opening, at this level of our interpretation, the hypostasis of the Subject as Ipseity.

In his *Philosophie première*, Jankélévitch asserts that “this fleeting *Itself* [*Lui-Même*], melting and fluid, is nothing, not even itself [*Soi*] – it is *Ipse*, a Self-expressed in Person, not *Idem*” (Howells 2001, 96). Ipseity develops the fact-of-having-been-made, a fact that it is not forgivable. Therefore, the Subject’s condition implies in forgiveness the representation, the identity and the condition of the Person¹². Pain or injustice caused by any death reminds the responsibility that the I has both for the Person and the Subject’s principles¹³. This is why forgiveness belongs to the Subject’s ipseity, and “everything remaining outside it”, as Levinas says, makes the object of the otherness and of the interval.

¹² On the other hand, Jankélévitch states that the pain does not affect the I, but affects what is mine.

¹³ In “Le pure et l’impure”, Jankélévitch explains that regretting is not an attitude addressed by the person’s ipseity. Any regret is a remorse without object, a sort of colloquial and normal attitude that implies no interior transformation, no personal humility, no confession. Jankélévitch agrees that remorsement has a specific optimism, one that is based on the fact that whatever was done can be erased, by time, leaving no wounds, no rest, no pains. But, related to time, any done thing [*factum*] can be undone, only the fact-of-having-been-made [*fecisse*] is unbreakable, unforgettable. See Vladimir Jankélévitch, “Le pur et l’impure”, in *Philosophie morale*, ed. Françoise Schwab, Paris, Flammarion, 1998, pp. 711-12.

III. Derrida and the Final of “the Hyperbolic Ethics”: The Unpardonable, from Forgiving Something to Forgiving Someone. Death in the First Person and Forgiveness in the First Person

Derrida is the one who gives to the pure and to the impure claimed by Jankélévitch a particular significance in the context of forgiveness: distinguishing the excuse, the forgiveness and the reconciliation represents giving different senses to the pure and to the impure in the context of a sin's absolution. Derrida often associates the forgiveness with a calculated social practice, that multiplies the Subject's representation through confession, exoneration, public excuse, withdrawal of certain representations from a community's context, in the terms of postmodern geopolitics. Discussing humanity's crimes as human actions and reactions, Derrida describes Jankélévitch's perspective on unpardonable as a question of limits. The Hegelian tonality is, at this level, regained and contextualised in a proper manner:

In an analogous fashion, Hegel, the great thinker of “forgiveness” and “reconciliation” said that all is forgivable except the crime against spirit, that is to say, against the reconciling power of forgiveness. (Derrida 2001, 34)

Derrida observes Jankélévitch's intention to dissociate, in this context, the intention to forgive by the forgiveness' exigencies, noting that in the case of the Jews and the Nazis, no one asked for pardon to no one.

Derrida proposes, in consequence, the deconstruction of the logical condition of consciousness' dialogue as forgiveness: supposing the necessity of asking for pardon¹⁴ in order to offer and occur pardon – this is the moment when the hyperbolic ethics¹⁵ of Jankélévitch, accepting

¹⁴ “In order for us to forgive, it is first necessary – is it not?, that one comes to us to ask for forgiveness” (Jankelevitch 2005, 157).

¹⁵ Derrida explains the hyperbolic ethics of Jankélévitch in an interview in 1998: “Jankélévitch, who is a French philosopher of Jewish Russian origin, wrote a philosophical book on forgiveness, on the Jewish-Christian-Greek history of this concept. This book, written in the early sixties, did not deal with the Shoah or the Holocaust. It was a philosophical book on the ethics of forgiveness, on the concept of forgiveness, on the heritage of this concept. A very strong book, which,

the partisanship of love's imperative and forgiveness disappears – "ethics beyond ethics, there perhaps is the undiscovered place of forgiveness" (Derrida 2001, 36). If the impossibility of a fair punishment is annulling the possibility of forgiving a criminal, the unpardonable coming, according to Jankélévitch, from the irreversibility of a state of a fact, Derrida proposes reconsidering the givens of the forgiveness, associating Jankélévitch's errors with Arendt's ones. Two seem to be the givens of the forgiveness, radically interpreted:

Forgiveness must rest on a human possibility – I insist on these two words, and above all on the anthropological feature which decides everything (because it will always be about, at the end of it, knowing if forgiveness is a possibility or not, or even a faculty, thus a sovereign "I can" and a human power or not);
The human possibility is the correlation to the possibility of punishment – not to avenge oneself, which is something different, to which forgiveness is even more foreign, but to punish according to the law. (Derrida 2001, 37)

Following an opposed direction to Jankélévitch's one, the history of forgiveness begins with the unpardonable. The ambiguity of forgiveness is dependent, from Derrida's perspective, by the complement of the action: do I forgive Someone or Something? The Object – being the Something – is not consuming in forgiveness the Person, since forgiving Someone involves, through the unpardonable, the impossibility of forgiving your own Self (in a Christian rigorous monotheism, God gives forgiveness to all those who forgave the sins of their sinners). In other words, for Derrida, the forgiveness's deconstruction is the construction of the Subject: forgiveness is possible only when the Person is tempted to forgive the unpardonable. Forgiveness is not dependent by the instance, but by an ethical condition of potentiality. Even though "crime against humanity is a modern example of the unpardonable" (2001, 33), pure forgiveness is always fallible in an empirical and pragmatic

inscribing itself in a certain manner within the Judeo-Christian tradition, recommended what Jankélévitch himself called a hyperbolic ethics of forgiveness, that is the absolute commandment to forgive evil: even if evil is stronger than forgiveness, forgiveness must be stronger than evil. Thus, he maintained a certain prescription of absolute forgiveness." (Derrida, 1998, 3).

context: the pure forgiveness is outside the Subject, but not properly in the sense expressed by Levinas. Forgiveness conserves, for Derrida, a main tension between the transcendental and the empirical: despite the fact that ideally, it is associated with a pure action, it will always be manifested impure. The pure and the impure's opposition constructs the impossibility and the probability of any conciliation:

Forgiveness is not, it should not be, normal, normative, normalizing. It should remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality. (Derrida 2001, 32)

Hence, the temporality announced by Derrida is not an instance, but an interval, and forgiveness, as empirical fallibility, cannot be recognized from Subject to Subject, but from Person to Person, from Person to normalized Subject, accepted and punished socio-politically. In Derrida's opinion, in the forgiveness moment has no secret, at least not an internalised one by the Subject, or an unsecularised one.

Obviously, Jankélévitch avoids calling the Individual in constructing the Subject's identity as a Person, which is, in my point of view, a contradictory movement to the forgiveness philosophy proposed by Derrida. Furthermore, Derrida himself hides a paradox developed in his argument for forgiveness. At the beginning, he accepts the possibility that a Person forgives someone's mistakes, which does not exclude continuing the punishment through instance and juridical instruments. Forgiveness belongs to an Individual but the sanction is applied to a Person, reminding the injustice relationship of two human beings with the same rights, thus, the relationship between two Persons. Despite the fact that Derrida sustains at the beginning of his essay that forgiveness without punishment and forgiveness without strength are the most desirable forms of the pardonable, inspired from the Jewish ethical treatment, he affirms that converting the secret to a principle is an exigency of founding democracy:

Make of this trans-political principle a political principle, a political rule or position taking: it is necessary also in politics to respect the secret, that which exceeds the political or that which is no longer in the juridical domain. This is what I would call "democracy to come".

To put it otherwise, forgiveness is beyond law, transcendental, and this is why, only the punishment, the sanction, the retribution and the inter-relational can be normalized.

However, both Jankélévitch' and Derrida's perspectives remain significant:

In Jankélévitch's argument, forgiveness still finds a place as event of life, even if is a rare one, meanwhile Derrida assumes forgiveness as postponement or hiding. It is never empirically recognised. If in Jankélévitch's philosophy the instance allows the possibility of forgiveness, in Derrida's one it is already denied from the main condition of defining itself. (Lupo 2010, 28)

In consequence, I consider that it is the secret's fundament the one which confers Derrida's interpretation a proper background of action for death at the first Person and forgiveness at the first Person: here, nothing remains outside the Subject, except the normalising's condition, the legal interval. This kind of forgiveness is impossible because it has to be subsequent to its own death, a requirement which is from the beginning compromised. In a way, following Jankélévitch, who did not realised the partisanship that he has encouraged between the Individual's value and the forgiveness phenomena, otherwise never recognised, Derrida assumes:

The tragedy of the I awakes an echo in Ourselves, but We sends constantly to the solitary experience of an I (...), the I that will die alone, confronting that personal death that anyone must die on its own. (Jankélévitch, 2005, 27)

IV. The Paradox of the Forgiving's Time: Levinas' Argument and the Formula of Death in the Second Person and the Forgiving in the First Person. Returning to Jankélévitch: What Remains Outside the Subject?

Levinas follows both Derrida and Jankélévitch. He admits that ethics is the temporality's result, treating Jankélévitch not as a Christolocentric (Udoff 2013, 6), as he seems for Derrida, but as a philosopher who transfers the contents of the Jewish ethics to the

ancient Greek one. Levinas seems more attached to Jankélévitch through his *Treatise on the Great Virtues*, in which Jankélévitch's ego-tropism proposes, each time, *the I* as the one who has to prefer *the Other* despite his own *Self*. In fact, what connects Levinas and Jankélévitch in the philosophy of forgiveness is the metaphysics and the moral of the second Person.

Jankélévitch asks:

Why would Your existence be, *a priori*, more precious than mine? Or why would be my existence, *a priori*, less valuable than yours? Why should be the second Person more important than the first one? And, especially, why existence, which is good as long as is someone else's existence, might become bad if it would integrate me? (Jankélévitch 1968, 9)

The forgiveness from Person to Person becomes, in Jankélévitch's treatise, matured at another level: it is the I's forgiveness for a You, realised through duty and right, so, through love. We shall see in the next section of this article why "rights without duties mean what the I calls the You without a You. A You is an I without duties. An I is a You without duties" (Jankélévitch 1986, 72) and why is a certain perspective more familiar to Levinas to express, through forgiveness, what remains outside the Subject.

For Levinas, the I is responsible for the You till the substitution of one with another, and this is how it is explained any ethical impersonal relation as an exteriority. Through a subjectivity's process, the Other becomes the I: therefore, the forgiveness problem, in Levinas' terms, is expressed in an ethical discourse called under the next formula: the death on the second Person, the forgiveness on the first Person. The death's problem is laying on the Other's right to exist. Hence, I consider that on forgiveness issue, Levinas interprets "the subject as a hostage and the subjectivity of the subject as a substitution breaking with being's essence" (Levinas 1998, 84). The Other is outside the Subject, as his death also remains; moreover, even if one is not possessing the consciousness of the Other's death, one might claim his responsibility. Under this terms, it is easy to understand why, I can forgive Someone's death caused by an Other, since that Someone become's intimate for the I as a You. From my point of view, Levinas exposed his theory with high

loyalty for Jankélévitch's perspective expressed in *Treatise on Death*: "I later, You now and He now; You later and He later"¹⁶ – this are times of death, recognised as times of forgiveness. Otherwise, the author of *Totality and Infinite* confesses that:

The paradox of pardon lies in its retroaction; from the point of view of common time it represents an inversion of the natural order of things, the reversibility of time. It involves several aspects. Pardon refers to the elapsed instant; it permits the subject who had committed himself in a past instant to be as though that instant had not past on, to be as though he had not committed himself. Active in a stronger sense than forgetting, which does not concern the reality of the event forgotten, pardon acts upon the past, somehow repeats the event, purifying it. But in addition, forgetting nullifies the relations with the past, whereas pardon conserves the past pardoned in the purified present. The pardoned being is not the innocent being. The difference does not justify placing innocence above pardon; it permits the discerning in pardon of a surplus of happiness, the strange happiness of reconciliation, the *felix culpa*, given in an everyday experience which no longer astonishes us. (Levinas 1969, 283)

Not accidentally, Levinas's perspective dedicated to recovering the Other's time through reaction affirms its understanding as belonging to a privileged You, in the second Person's quality, discussed by Jankélévitch: "You represents, indeed, the first Another, an Another immediately Other and a Non-I in the tangency point with I, the proximate limit of otherness" (28). As Jankélévitch recognises in the forgiveness paradox a moral paradox, in the same manner, Levinas is considering forgiveness as the host of a contradictory movement of recovering the Other's Person through its own Self, represented as an I. For Levinas, forgiveness is a moment, being exactly what Jankélévitch would understand through instance, but recovering the Other in the forgiveness' act is an interval, and in this regard, the author keeps a declared loyalty for Jankélévitch's philosophy¹⁷.

¹⁶ Jankélévitch, in his *Treatise..*, continues, explaining that since they are about someone's death, the three evoked times constitute the object of an authentic reflection. (Jankélévitch, 32)

¹⁷ "The paradox of the pardon of fault refers to pardon as constitutive of time itself. The instants do not link up with one another indifferently, but extend from the

In consequence, what remains outside the Subject? Exactly what lies behind it as a continuity given to a beyond: on the one hand, we find subjectivation, on the other hand, we remark the moral absolutism of values, both preferred by Jankélévitch as a determined condition for the absolute character of forgiveness itself¹⁸. At this level, Levinas is elaborating his own paradox, defining forgiveness as what remains outside the Subject and not into it, allowing the continuous connection of the Self as an I with the Other: forgiveness ensures this fidelity coming from outside, a forgiveness developed as a right and as a duty.

V. The Subject after the Forgiveness, the Forgiveness after the Subject. Conclusions

Trying to elaborate a Subject's deconstruction through discussing death's and forgiveness's experiences as reactive phenomena, attached to a moral perspective of interpretation, applied in Jankélévitch's, Derrida's and Levinas' philosophies, I have observed in what manner the critique of the Subject itself changes, depending on the report established between the Ipseity and the forms of its Person. Despite the hypostasis of the normal, normative and normalising that forgiveness presents, the main consequence of this critical process is represented by

Other unto me. The future does not come to me from a swarming of indistinguishable possibles which would flow toward my present and which I would grasp; it comes to me across an absolute interval whose other shore the Other absolutely other – though he be my son – is alone capable of marking, and of connecting with the past. But then the Other is alone capable of retaining from this past the former Desire that animated it, which the alterity of each face increases and deepens even more profoundly." (Levinas 1969, 283).

¹⁸ "Why is the beyond separated from the below? Why, to go unto the good, are evil, evolution, drama, separation necessary? Re commencement in discontinuous time brings youth, and thus the inanition of time. Time's infinite existing ensures the situation of judgment, condition of truth, behind the failure of the goodness of today. By fecundity I dispose of an infinite time, necessary for truth to be told, necessary for the particularism of the apology to be converted into efficacious goodness, which maintains the I of the apology in its particularity, without history breaking and crushing this allegedly still subjective concordance." (Levinas 1969, 283).

the fact that, on the one hand, ethics is constituted on metaphysical solid principles of instituting the Subject, proposing a moral engagement (from the ethical minimalism or extremism to the ontological minimalism, following Jankélévitch's terminology); on the other hand, ethics is assumed in this context of the Subject's deconstruction in complementarity with aesthetics, not presenting this two domains in a traditional contrast. "Aesthetics is polychromy, picturesque, variety (as space), ethics is undogmatic seriousness (as time). By this aesthetics, Jankélévitch is connecting his ethics" (Ianos 1996, 189).

Therefore, giving right to Jankélévitch, the tragic belongs only to the spheres of the moral consciousness. In light of all previous exposures, arguing in what extent are justified the three grids of interpretation of the Person in terms of death and forgiveness – Jankélévitch's one, through death on third Person and forgiveness on first Person, Derrida's one, through death on the first Person and forgiveness on the first Person, and Levinas' one, through death on the second Person and forgiveness on the first Person – I proposed in the present article not only an unconventional manner to criticise the report between ethics and metaphysics, different from the classic or Christian interpretations of the Person, but also a pertinent evaluation of the three Persons, distinguished, two by two, monadic and personal, *quod erat demonstrandum*. In consequence, it is my personal belief that a proper interpretation of Jankélévitch's philosophy through the continuations proposed by Derrida and Levinas is significantly contributing at creating a new perspective on the postmodern Subject's condition.

As a matter of fact, how could we discuss about "the office of deaths as an office like any other", following Jankélévitch's metaphor, putting the forgiveness before death as a nucleus of the Subject's and Person's authenticity, without confusing them? Otherwise, assumed in a postmodern key, trifled between rationality's eccentricities and prejudices of the common sense, speculated in ISI articles and conferences, the context of death would be only the pretext of a footnote, while, beyond all this aspects, "the obituary event triggers, like a simple retirement, a chain of appointments, changes and promotions". At least, this kind of approach is a familiar manner to discuss about forgiveness as a metaphysics of death.

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HOWL AND THE POSTMODERN SUBJECTIVITY

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Abstract

History is, in a sense, a story about us viewing ourselves. Why does the “Subject” matter? Because the Subject is our history – a story, a narrative about ourselves. For many centuries we have understood to use this concept to describe a relationship between us and the world, to ponder epistemological, metaphysical or ethical questions. But now, in postmodern times, we came to see the “Subject” as it is: a narrative, a structure of culture and language created by us to be used. Through the analysis of Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl” we open up a way to regain this insight, we open a road which shows this narrative in its narrative-ness and through this opening up a deconstruction of the history of philosophy.

Keywords: “Howl”, Subject, otherness, postmodernism.

In September 1955 at the Six Gallery in San Francisco, Allen Ginsberg read “Howl”, literally a howl about the birth of a new generation that brought on a new conscience of the self. Allen Ginsberg writes in “Howl” about the struggle between the rebellious spirit of the young generation pit against an overwhelming socio-political system, a final pagan deity who seems bent on destroying this spirit. In “Stories Done”, Mikal Gilmore (an editorialist at *The Rolling Stones* magazine) remarked that “Something opened up in America’s culture and in it’s future the day that Ginsberg gave utterance to these thoughts with *Howl*” (Gilmore 2008).

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This cultural mutation, foreseen by the history of the first 50 or so years of the XX-th century, marked by war and economical recession, excess, anxiety and depression outbursts in a sublime manner in Ginsberg's words, like a Prometheus finally unchained who rushes to attack the very order which imprisoned him for insubordination. What happens then in "Howl"?

The poem is structured in three parts and an end note and is centered around experiencing the contemporary world. Today the image built by Ginsberg seems normal, a phenomenology of our day to day life and world; but at the time the poem was published it was a scandalous one, proved by the fact that Ginsberg was prosecuted for public indecency and the poem being banned by the American government. But all this was sort of expected from a poem which presents itself like a frustration howl of a whole generation, who sees itself as a release and in the same time a struggle to aggressively capture its own legitimacy. "Howl" is not a quiet poem but a loud one, with unsettling imagery, in which individuals who have reached the limits of social oppression finally get a chance to cry against the system, thus showing they prefer their individuality and artistic life energy to social conformity and the comfort of blending in... But in the same time it is a poem of self-destruction of this generation in which the theme of subjectivity is repeatedly questioned, first in regard to Moloch – the demonized society and then in regard to itself and its own mental alienation. "Howl" can be read in many ways but what we are interested in here is the image of subjectivity in this defining poem for the attitude and vision of postmodernism, for the question we ask is this – "Can we speak of a death of the Subject (and subjectivity) in postmodernism or is it a change in something else?".

We were speaking earlier about the way in which "Howl" is a defining example of the postmodern attitude; but the poem itself is not entirely postmodern. "Howl" rather sits in a transition point, between modern and postmodern culture; although textually and stylistically it is not yet postmodern through its themes and the way it expounds them, "Howl" is the very transition from modern to postmodern (and by this I do not mean that this transition was done exclusively through this text rather that this poem, because it is not yet a definitive image of the way

a postmodern text is constituted as a dynamic of this transition, illustrating and performing it in the same time). Three I think are the themes and perspectives through which Ginsberg puts himself in this transition. Firstly there is an annulment of the between high-culture and low-culture, between cultural elitism and mass culture. It's enough to consider these lines: "Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated" and "angel headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo" (Ginsberg 1956). Here Ginsberg combines "elevated" imaginary – the angelic or celestial – with urban imagery like a patchy rooftop, bitnick slang and pop language. Together "genitals and manuscripts" are flaunted – art and sex, literary culture and carnality are blended. The second element of this postmodernity is a fragmentation of the self: a de-centerment of subjectivity, a deconstruction of the individual as a Subject, projecting this deconstruction at the individual's level then at society's level and finally at metaphysical level, concerning the whole *kosmos* in which the poem is set. The circularity of these three levels is obvious and they collapse in each other. This circularity in which the metaphysical, the social and the individual seem to be the same thing reveals the final third element of *Howl's* postmodernism. The logical conclusion of this postmodern pastiche is a specific flatness or depthlessness – what remains is a plane of surface images, like a curved film in Hinton's "A plane world"². These all reveal themselves to the postmodern eye as just narratives; thus they are deconstructed, one by one; and their allegorical death transforms them in meta-narratives of the other levels. The conflict between the intrinsic character of each level and the meta-narrative positioning is the source which opens up a postmodern hermeneutic horizon in which what seems like the ultimate deconstruction of subjectivity takes place.

To reach this decentering of subjectivity as it is experimented by Ginsberg here in "Howl", I will start from this third level that I mentioned earlier. In *The Postmodern Condition (La Condition postmoderne)*, Lyotard gives a first definition of postmodernism:

² See C.H. Hinton, "A Plane World" in *Scientific Romances*, Vol. 1, 1884.

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its expression, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements – narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valences specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable. (Lyotard 1984, XXIV).

Going back to Ginsberg's text the incredulity towards the grand narratives meant to legitimize the metaphysical, the social and the individual as obvious. Metaphysically – the ontological constitution of the poem's universe is turned upside down; in the third part of the poem, a descent into the mental universe of Carl Solomon offers the metaphysical constituents of the universe in which the battle between Molloch (second part) and the contemporary generation takes part; of course we do have a paradigm here, but this being one of madness, is deconstructed even in its constitution and is de-centered so that the metaphysics of this universe is one of *crisis*. The whole poem thus seems to us like a giant experiencing of this postmodern universe; the experience of the universe is set on three levels – individually, socially and metaphysically; and at each level the world is experienced in the way of a *crisis* – existential, social or metaphysical. The crisis of which Lyotard spoke above, trying to define postmodernism, the crisis of grand narratives, happens here as well as Ginsberg attacks each of these, one by one. In the end the crisis of subjectivity is, as we shall see, central to this endeavor.

The universe of Carl Solomon is dominated by the systematic descent of the high elements into the concrete, mundane and even ridiculous; this metaphysical restructuring makes the whole landscape seem crazy. But put within the entirety of the vision everything seems right and liberating; the descent of the ideal and the breakup of the transcendental conscience give a very strong sensation of freedom in which the individual expression takes first stage. For example when Ginsberg says:

*"where you bang on the catatonic piano the soul
is innocent and immortal it should never die
ungodly in an armed madhouse"
or "O victory forget your underwear we're free".*

The metaphysical deconstruction of the universe is the basis of this new found freedom, of this conquered freedom which marches forward towards the destruction of subjectivity; and we may ask ourselves – where does the problem of subjectivity appear here? But it is enough to analyze the structure of the text to see it – every odd verse is the same in this third part of the poem: "I am with you in Rockland." (Ginsberg 1956).

The obsessive repetition of this "I am with you" transforms the subjectivity and the otherness in a discursive structure showing that they are just linguistic devices, belonging to the narratology of the text. In the metaphysics in which we are thrown subjectivity and otherness are not; they appear only on the sidelines, as narrative structures; in this universe we can find only an expression of the vital artistic feeling of individuals. So here, at a first level, subjectivity is dispensed as just a narrative device and what seemed like a fundamental constituent of any ontology becomes a simple linguistic tool; this is because we are no longer interested in metaphysics/ ontology, now they appear to us rather as just narratives thrown abusively upon us, in which we seem to be forced to believe.

On the contrary, taking aside metaphysics, only the direct experience of the world remains; completely immersed in this enveloping experience we are, of course, mad like Solomon, but completely free, denouncing the narratives imposed upon us by exterior forces. It is enough to compare this paradigm to different metaphysics and ontologies of modern philosophical tradition – Descartes, Kant or even Husserl to see that the very thing which was the central point – subjectivity – was disclosed as just another narrative, a linguistic tool, a sideline structure or, in most case, an absent one, whose removal frees the respective world of its own tyranny (on a side note here we can see the stem for the postmodern death of the author in literary theory – an idea which reverberated further into the field of semiotics with concepts like *opera aperta* (Eco 1962) or *struttura assente* (Eco 1980). Metaphysics

thus becomes simply a narration about the world; like any narration it is essentially an open work and thus subjectivity is, in this context (and *context* is the fundamental word here!) an absent structure.

Next, let's move towards the second part of the poem, dedicated to the *crisis* which bears the face of Molloch, the pagan deity to which the Canaanite people sacrificed their children. Molloch is for Ginsberg the face of society and thus a narrative of evil. By effectively emptying the content of the opposition between the individual and the society symbolized by Molloch, we come in this point to a paradox – we come to a central dilemma of postmodernism. If we accept the cultural and political implication through which “Howl” is a defining work of art of post-war culture – an affirmation of individual, cultural and sexual liberty – then we effectively accept that Ginsberg tore down the institutions; he tore down social institutions, government bureaucracy and the great narrative that Molloch symbolizes. But by tearing down Molloch, he actually brought down the concept itself of a great narrative – including his own narrative. For the concept of great narratives is in itself a great narrative. Thus, if postmodernism brings on the end of great narratives, then it must not be one. So every event which happens in this cultural horizon – for example the event of the reading of “Howl” in 1955, or the story of how what was initially a sub-culture succeeded in changing the cultural landscape in just evening – all these suffer the same fate.

There is an inherent paradox here – a great narrative to end and at the same time remove all great narratives, including himself. The structure of this reflexivity affects the view that subjectivity is just another great narrative, in the context of a *crisis* between the individual and society. The deconstruction of subjectivity as a narrative of society meant to make individuals conform to norms we are meant to enter inside this narrative; if subjectivity is artificially imposed on the individual, its deconstruction is artificially imposed upon it from its outside; so even the tragedy of this battle between individuals and Molloch, a crisis of subjectivity reflected in society, is just a narration which, ultimately, does not authentically belong to the individuals but is a legitimacy of another subjectivity constructed negatively in relation to a historico-social context which used to legitimize an order now obsolete. Leaving behind the old order is a new order; that is why the

deconstruction of subjectivity in the postmodern horizon transforms this very horizon in an existential condition. In the world in which Molloch is finally tore down like any other narrative we are left with only two options – a nihilistic approach in which these narratives are completely deconstructed and removed and, in their complete absence the individual remains in a definitive suspended state of disbelief; the other option is that of a generalized euphoria, a kind of utopia, in which these narratives do not cease to be but simply they don't have any authority any more, thus a general state of relativism is instated and the individuals, freed from the authority of such narratives, become cultural products of this new condition.

Between these two options it is clear that we cannot find an objective criterion to choose one of them and the universe swings back and forth between nihilism and the euphoria of relativity. And we shall see later, at the individual's level, how this constant swing is seen. But for now let us remark that in this second part, by deconstructing the narrative of society which wants to conform individuals to its rules, the narrative of the Subject is itself removed; the Subject is here a necessary construct for the social paradigm because the authoritarian society sees individuals as subjects, thus setting norms which transcend pure individuality. The transcendence of pure individuality becomes the constitutive moment in this politico-social landscape; accordingly the Subject is deconstructed at a social level and the de-centering of the self is made towards the individual which, once being freed, is not preoccupied any more with thinking himself, but rather with experiencing. And this is what the first part is about, in which the Subject is completely deconstructed at this final level of the individual.

In the first part of "Howl", Ginsberg speaks of those whom he calls "the best minds of my generation" – outcasts, freaks, sexually different, artists, but most important free people. In a continuous struggle with Molloch against conformity, against abuse and captivity they live by expressing themselves not fulfilling a role. The poem starts with the pronoun "I" which soon dissolves into the relative-interogative "who". This dissolution is in fact a de-centering of the Self caused by the crisis of the Subject in the postmodern cultural paradigm. It is plain to see that the general state of things throughout the poem is one of *crisis*, but

nowhere is it so acute as here, where the self of the individuals is lost and dispersed in the others; this communion with others actually removes the Subject's independence which predicates himself based on difference; the others in which he loses himself are others exactly on the basis of them being different from the Subject; the de-centering of the Subject in the others means its dissemination in this difference which seems to precede him. This is what we are after here – the deconstruction of the Subject as a final grand narrative, a linguistic structure which, once removed, gives way to the experience of individuals. And we can see the way in which this deconstruction is reflected on the individual's level by following Ginsberg's text and looking at the way in which these people live their lives, experiencing their own world. Every descriptive line is not just in the possession of the Subject; everything takes up a general rather than individual space. Thus, a lot of the specific referrals to Ginsberg's contemporaries, be them to Kerouac ("who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity") or to Huncke ("who walked all night with their shoes full of blood on the snowbank docks waiting for a door in the East River to open to a room full of steam-heat and opium"), communicate an universal experience. Ginsberg avoids nothing and experiences to the hilt. But in the postmodern space these experiences are not only his with the de-centering of the Subject. After just a couple of the poem's lines, the self is completely consumed by the descriptive "other": there is no more an anchored "I", a centered Subject. There is no Ginsberg anymore, but fragments of his experiences as they came to him, line after line. He gives himself to these experiences – he dislodges his "I" and this is thus dispersed.

Ginsberg's perspective here is thus paradigmatic for the entire postmodern ideology for the deconstruction of the Subject and subjectivity. The philosophical source of this deconstruction is of course the deconstruction of objectivity. The poetical source to which Ginsberg converges is the individual experience. The problem of the deconstruction of objectivity appears in postmodernism when we adopt a critical attitude towards the notion of truth. This critical attitude calls forth and brings into judgment the very constitution of truth. And, as we noticed earlier, even from Lyotard's text, truth and with it objectivity

become in the postmodern hermeneutic horizon just grand narratives, which don't find any justification anymore or any authority. For example Lyotard says: "Thus justice is consigned to the grand narrative in the same way as truth." (Lyotard 1984, XXIV). By making truth be just another meta-narrative the whole theoretical construction which surrounds it is put into the same hermeneutic horizon – of interpreting it just as a narrative. But it is exactly in this theoretical construction surrounding truth that the idea of objectivity reveals itself. And the deconstruction of objectivity reveals the subjectivity in relation to which the objectivity constitutes itself as such.

The question that we must ask now is this: is objectivity possible? If we interpret this first part of the poem as a reflection upon the contemporary condition of human being, then – as it is presented here by Ginsberg – this human being is in the postmodern condition described by Lyotard. In this condition objectivity cannot be possible anymore for it assumes an epistemological model which cannot be sustained in the world as it is described here. The premises of objectivity reside in the possibility of Truth, conceived outside of a Subject; the epistemological model of objectivity presupposes a cognitive realism based on representation – the reproduction for a subject of an objective reality which exists outside of him. This means that the premise for the possibility of objectivity resides in the relationship between the Subject and the world, and even more precisely in a metaphysics of a world existing independently of a subject. But this metaphysics of subjectivity inevitably takes us to the problem of the possibility of the outside world. But the possibility of the outside world already articulates, on the basis of this "outside", a privileged spot for the subject in relation to a foreign reality which is already given to him.

This privileged spot for the Subject can be seen in the history of western metaphysics and is substantiated in an increasingly acute manner beginning with Descartes and the paradigm he opens up. Starting with Descartes truth shifts its location from the world to the subject, from that which is given as being exterior to that which is at hand, and what is more at hand than our own subjectivity and our own Beingness. We thus become our own objects but with a privileged status – we are at-hand for ourselves in a way that all other objects which make

up our exteriority are not and nor will they ever be (a conclusion fully explored in the metaphysical negativity of Kant, expressed in the ultimate incognoscibility of the *noumena*). Furthermore the accessibility of our exteriority lies in the accessibility of our own subjectivity, but we can appropriate it fully only in a dark and weird separation of self, in which by separating from ourselves we can make ourselves be our own objects, we transform ourselves into the object in relation to which we are a subject. Descartes concludes that only after rooting ourselves into a secure certainty we can direct ourselves towards the outside world and appropriate it; thus we shall have a positive knowledge of the world, the soul, of the ultimate nature of reality and the essence of things. The purpose for this new subject and this new subjectivity rooted in the certainty of our self-knowledge is to create a ground on which the representation of all things as objects of knowledge can be built. The active presupposition here is that if we have at-hand a strong enough fundamental engagement all the objects of experience have the potential to be known; the subject itself is present in the relationship between the mind and the world, giving a sole direction, from knower towards that which is to be known; this model claims that it does not add anything to the essence of objects, their knowledge being imprinted in the Subject. Going further along this metaphysics we will eventually reach Hegel's *Aufhebung* in which, like in a final conclusion of the paradigm, a certain definitive unity between the Subject and the world, between the concept and the conscience is reached.

Truth is here the presence or presentation of essence as *Gewesenheit*, of *wesen* as *having-been*. Consciousness is the truth of man to the extent that man appears to himself in consciousness in his being-past, in his to-have-been, in his past surpassed and conserved, retained, interiorized and *relevé* [the French translation of *aufheben*]. (Derrida 1997, 120-1)

Relevé would thus be the Hegelian meeting between the thesis and the antithesis, that elation that can stretch towards any direction. And this is exactly the starting point for the postmodern condition – of the man who cannot find himself in himself, the man who does not step out of his self together with his self to appropriate an exterior reality, transforming thus the exteriority of the world into the interiority of his

own subjectivity. Reading the first part of "Howl", it is obvious that objectivity has become impossible for that "I" with which the poem begins that ends up disseminated into the others. In a group of individuals in which everybody keeps its own individuality, objectivity becomes pointless because the world is not seen as an exteriority that needs to be exhausted. The world comes into being in the complete experimentation of the Beingness of individuals, in life experience such as truth is moved from representation to a performative model. What does this mean for the problem of subjectivity? If objectivity cannot be constituted then how can we constitute objectivity? Here I think an idea expressed by Derrida in *Speech and Phenomena* is very important:

This determination of *absolute subjectivity* would also have to be crossed out as soon as we conceive the present on the basis of difference, not the reverse. The concept of subjectivity belongs apriori and in general to the order of the constituted [...] There is no constituting subjectivity. The very concept of constitution itself must be deconstructed. (Derrida 1973, 84-85)

Thus the essential way of being of the subject, that which seemed to traditional metaphysics as being the essence of subjectivity – the constituting character – is eliminated in the postmodern condition. The reason upon which this is possible? The preceding character of *difference*. Searching for a definition for *difference* Derrida remarks: "if there were a definition of *différance*, it would be precisely the limit, the interruption of the Hegelian relève wherever it operates" (Derrida 1973, 40). What does all this mean? That difference precedes the subject and not the other way around. The preceding character of difference in relation to the subject is that which nullifies the it's constituting character; and through the deconstruction of the metaphysics which put the subject in a central spot is accomplished for how would there still be possible a metaphysics of subjectivity in which the world is understood from the point of view of a persisting consciousness (as we could interpret *ousia* or *hypokeimenon*) if this continuous presence is no longer given such as we could build from it the presence of the world and objects in it? The difference, it would seem, nullifies the primordially of the subject; in another passage Derrida again remarks, questions the Subject:

What differs? Who differs? What is *différance*? (...) If we accepted this form of the question, in its meaning and its syntax ("What is?", "Who is?", "What is that?"), we would have to conclude that *différance* has been derived, has happened, is to be mastered and governed on the basis of the point of a present being as a *Subject* a *who*. (Derrida 1991, 65)

This shows that in Derrida's vision difference, being constitutive for the Subject, makes it lose not only its ontological privileged position but also his internal unity. So it must be deconstructed; and the deconstruction of the Subject brings out the historical character of the idea that we now have about it and it shows that subjectivity is not a given of our existence but a narrative constructed through overlapping layers built by a tradition of metaphysics centered around a "who", a subject. The de-centering of the Subject is the attitude that we can find in "Howl" because now, the author's conscience, gone out of itself is positioned in the space of intersubjectivity. But not only the author's own subjectivity is disseminated – the subjectivity of those designated by "the greatest minds of our generation" is disseminated as well; what is then left behind? We are left with inter-subjectivity, a space between all these individuals in which the author positions himself; and because this space does not belong to any subjectivity in particular the very authorship of the author is lost in dissemination, letting inter-subjectivity to be manifest and inviting the reader to position himself in this space in which the classical conditions of author and reader dissipate; in return we are presented with individuals who experiment a world which does not come to them as a given from the outside, but which reveals itself in its very experimentation.

Let's now look behind at the way in which subjectivity appeared to us in the context of postmodern condition. First it appeared as a product of cultural-historical tradition. This tradition, based on a metaphysics of presence, puts subjectivity in a central spot, giving it a constitutive character in regard to the world. The world is a given, exterior, and its essence is created through the relation which the subject has with it. The subject exercises its constituting powers first regarding himself, then regarding the world, giving everything an essence (giving substance), a nature. And in all this the subject is not considered at an individual level, but beyond this, at a transcendental one, taking himself as its

object. This tradition ends up in a crisis of representation in which individuals lose their identity in an ultimate union with a world whose Beingness they have just built. The postmodern crisis of the subject is the crisis of this state. This state in which the individual cannot understate himself any longer as a subject from the perspective of the whole history this word implies. So the construct is compromised. What Ginsberg's poem ultimately shows is such a state in which the individual realizes the construction in front of which he stands, a historical construction in which he was put in order to make him conform. It is unsettling at least the idea of this central Man, the Subject, who organizes and constitutes reality around him through the power of his reason, is not a natural state of humanity, but a historical construct, an ideological role which humans were put to play. Michel Foucault in *Let mots et les choses – une archéologie des sciences humaines* draws this conclusion:

The relatively late development of human sciences – economy, psychology, philology etc. is an indicator of the historical moment in which their object of inquiry, the human Subject, appeared, as a theoretical construct; [...] the eighteenth century did not hand down to them, in the name of man or human nature, a space, circumscribed on the outside but still empty, which it was then their role to cover and analyze. The epistemological field traversed by the human sciences was not laid down in advance: no philosophy, no political or moral option, no empirical science of any kind, no observation of the human body, no analysis of sensation, imagination, or the passions, had ever encountered, in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, anything like man; for man did not exist [...]. (Foucault 1970, 344)

Foucault's point of view is that human sciences did not discover man, as physics discovered the atom – an empirical fact waiting to be investigated. On the contrary, it is these very scientific discourses that created Man in the sense of a Subject, as we now talk about it. Foucault further notes: "they appeared when man constituted him-self in Western culture as both that which must be conceived of and that which is to be known" (Foucault 1970, 345). And it is exactly this that the subject appears to be – a product of a culture; the moving of human being from a free individual to a product of a culture and a history is the element which in this case creates the crisis. So, the traditional view of the XVIIth or XVIIIth century of some philosophers like Hobbes, Rousseau or Locke that society is the product of the Subject which moves on from a natural

existence to existence in an organized society is inverse. It is not the Subject who created society but society that created the Subject – here is the core of the postmodern crisis as it is felt by the individual and here is what Ginsberg rebels against. If the Subject is just a product of society, a product of a culture, of a history, then this cannot be our authentic way of being. He is imposed onto us and we are molded into a shape by that flattening force, killer of individual freedom, that he calls Molloch. We must come out from underneath this pressure to find ourselves again; and we don't find ourselves as subjects, but we find ourselves living in the space of inter-subjectivity, meaning the space in which free individuals express themselves and interact with each other.

The postmodern deconstruction of the subject comes, as we have seen, from many directions. It can come from an epistemological point of view, as for example Lyotard saw it, and in this respect it is closely related to the questioning of the legitimacy of truth and representation; when objectivity and truth are narratives so is the Subject – a final grand narratives that must be overcome. At Derrida we can see the deconstruction of subjectivity from an onto-metaphysical perspective; by continuing the line of the destruction of the metaphysical tradition began by Heidegger, Derrida critiques the metaphysical essentiality of the Subject. He cannot be the central point of metaphysics anymore because the conditions which made him such – his permanent unity always being present and his constituting character, can no longer be justified when difference is recognized. The subject must be deconstructed and along with him the whole metaphysical history. At Foucault we had found an historic-social perspective of the concept of Subject and this had to be left behind as a product of the discourses of human science who tried to investigate it, a form created by society to take individuals into a certain point, in a certain order.

What is left now is to ask the question: if we have deconstructed the Subject and we left it beside us, where are we left, what is the state in which we are now, how are we now after this deconstruction? The crisis from which we started when we first deconstructed and dismissed the Subject can be overcome or it is a state of fact of the free individual and we cannot escape this postmodern crisis?

To answer this question we must go back to the point from which we began, a point seen also by Foucault. The Subject is the way in which we have built ourselves, in which we have imagined and represented ourselves. But because of this we are shown an opening that exists here. For if the Subject is not our *being-ness* but only a reflection of a choice, this means we can choose any possibility. And it is exactly this freedom that now lies before us that is the way out of the crisis.

Of course, setting aside the Subject leaves us without the fundamental structure that secular humanism has built. A structure which we *believed* was in us, in our very being, legacy of a scholastic disoriented between transcendence and the mundane, recovered by the early modernity and exploited until now. We are not interested here in the history of this structure, but in the fact that it is a structure in which, at some point along the way, we chose to believe in. It is a shock at first to transform truth in a structure in which sometimes we chose to believe in; the same happens with every other narrative and the reverberations of this cultural shock we can most acutely see in the revolt of man against God. In this perspective God Himself becomes a structure in which we chose to believe and this belief perpetuated over the ages. Nietzsche, for example, believed that by laying aside the burden of believing in such a structure, only then can we be truly free. So, to each his own, as far as beliefs, narratives and structures go. But why if we put aside such traditional perspectives must we find ourselves in a crisis? It is clear that we are in a permanent relationship with ourselves, but this relationship is, if we used a term coined by Pierce, a Dynamic Object. It is something that we relate to, but which always eludes our direct contact. For Pierce the Dynamic Object is defined by his absence, which becomes his way of being; but absence has many meanings.

If we take absence outside temporality – the dynamic object is not absent in the sense that although it is inaccessible now it was or will be at some point in time accessible (and here I am referring to Eco's understanding of Pierce's idea of a Dynamic Object³) – we can understand absence as the lack of being immediately-there, which is in

³ See Umberto Eco, "The limits of interpretation" in *Unlimited Semiosis and Drift*.

its nature an open possibility (*dynamis*). Our relationship to this Dynamic Object creates interpretations, one of them being this structure we name Subject. There is a permanent confusion at work here between our relationship with ourselves (my relationship with me) and our beingness; they are both Dynamic Objects and the Subject appears in their interpretation which is their actualization. So we can see that all these great narratives, the Subject being the most prominent one, are nothing but interpretations, actualization of a potentiality; if we continue the semiotic perspective we opened by appealing to Pierce, they are meanings that we give to a signifier, they are contents. So where is the postmodern crisis here? If we put aside the Subject we are not left empty and naked, but we return to a Dynamic Object – our being-ness, we return to their power (*dynamis*) of being. And we can build in place another narrative, another interpretation. It is thus clear that we cannot escape this existential hermeneutic act, for every time we will relate to our beingness as a Dynamic Object we will give a meaning through a signifier, an Immediate Object. Thus, if the Subject is a structure meant to make our own beingness accessible, it is clear now that we can replace it with anything else. And because this structure is just an interpretation, a meaning that we attached, it cannot have truth-value any more and thus, the question of truth here becomes irrelevant.

In conclusion, the Subject or subjectivity has appeared to us as just an interpretation of our very own beingness, taken as a Dynamic Object and following its deconstruction, the apparent crisis which opens becomes just an opportunity for a new interpretation of our power of being. In *A secret miracle*, Borges imagines a catalog of eternities whose first volume contained all the different such eternities, beginning with “the immutable Being of Parmenides” (Borges 2000); all these eternities are exposed as different narratives, interpretations of the idea of eternity. This is the image that we find here; the Subject is just an interpretation, one of the many possible, of the idea of Man. And its deconstruction does not bring on a crisis, but opens up a possibility (*dynamis*).

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MICHEL FOUCAULT AND THE CONCEPT OF *PARRHESIA*

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine different interpretations of the philosophical concept of *parrhesia*, developed in Michel Foucault's writings. On the one hand, *parrhesia* will be expressed as a traditional discourse about truth, through which the consciousness directs the human being to a better self-constitution. It is opposed to rhetoric and flattery, *parrhesia* being a direct, simple and responsible discourse. On the other hand, the origins of *parrhesia* are not represented by the forms of consciousness, nor by ethical contents, but by the democratic political dimensions. An authentic democracy, beyond its formal principles and structures, such as freedom of expression, equality before the law or the constitution requires *parrhesia* as courage, involving the risk that any citizen has to assume in terms of power. Last but not least, *parrhesia* is expressed in connection with cynical philosophers, with their forms of 'militant' life performed as the scandal of the truth.

Keywords: *parrhesia*, subject, truth, power, the aesthetics of existence, freedom, cynicism.

In this article I will examine the relation between the subject, power and truth as it was theorized by Michel Foucault at the end of his writings, when he dealt mainly with the concept of *parrhesia*. The problematic critique of personal identity is a central Foucauldian theme, which underlies his entire work.

Before I examine the concept of *parrhesia*, exploring its ramifications, I would like to shortly present some introductory ideas which I believe are important in order to understand his general project.

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Foucault tries to bracket all the supposedly universal, definitive and essential truths. Truth, as seen by Foucault, is never outside power relations and the way people conceive truth is determined precisely by power relations, so that the individual becomes the subject-object for knowledge as a result of specific power relations:

The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1980, 131)

We can contrast the idea of an authentic personal identity, which presupposes the search for the true self beyond power relations (just as in the case of existentialist and Freudian-Marxist philosophies) to the idea of practices of freedom inside the power relations, strongly connected to the idea of self-autocracy. We believe that in Foucauldian thought there are two distinctive moments concerning subjectivity. On the one side there is the *objectivation* of the individuals as subjects in certain truth-systems and on the other side there is the *subjectivation* of individuals starting with the acts of truth of the subjects themselves. If in the first phase the passive forms of submission – *assujettissement* – are central, in the second phase the active forms of *subjectivation* are essential. In other words, the individual as subject ceases to be considered solely as an effect of power-knowledge mechanisms which have the creation of passive and submissive subjects as purpose. Instead, he will be considered as subjectification, as a process through which the subject transforms itself and is constituted in an active relationship with the truth.

Foucault reveals the genealogy of desire and the establishment of the subject's relation to truth against the backdrop of submission. This is why, instead of searching for the true self, in which we may find the truth of desire, we should begin creating new ways to relate to ourselves

and the others, as the only forms of resistance to domination. If we think of the subject as interiority, as division, as scission, the only thing we do is to submit it. This relates to the idea of creation of new forms of subjectivity inspired by the Nietzschean model of the esthetical ideal according to which the discovery of an authentic self is not what is at stake, but the practical ideal of a different form of life, freed from the idea of an inner truth. In other words, it is about the creation of new relationships regarding the self, not according to universal laws, but to voluntary rules, to lifestyles, just as Deleuze points out with precision when he interprets Foucault. So we do not have relations of identity, but of differentiation, of creation, of innovation. In Foucault's case, the same as with Nietzsche's, the relationship to the self must be considered as analogous to artistic activity. Through the concept of "the aesthetics of existence" Foucault tries to eliminate everything that is Christian in the relationship of the subject to the self. This means the renouncing of the self and the hermeneutics of the self. For example, in the case of the Greek and Roman philosophers, the purpose of self-care is not the discovery of the self, but the mastery, the autonomy and the freedom of the self.

With regards to the "repressive hypothesis", according to which sexuality was repressed, Foucault evaluates it not in terms of submission and domination, but especially in terms of stimulation and verbalization. Ever since ancient Christianity and up to the contemporary era, we have been witnessing an entire process of proliferation of techniques which encourage us to verbalize sexuality. Moreover, even within the contemporary biological, medical, psychiatric and psychoanalytical discourses, we can observe the continuity of the catholic pastoral tradition of the confession of the flesh, where everything regarding sexuality had to be verbalized. We refer in this context to the surge of the concept of *scientia sexualis* different from *ars erotica*, in the way it was conceptualized and practiced in the Ancient Greco-Roman world, as well as in western cultures. Western modernity transforms sexuality into an instance for performing truth through which individuals recognize themselves and are constituted by a device of truth. The notion of *subjection* as *assujettissement* must not and can not be understood just as a simple submissive behavior, but in correlation to power:

This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to. (Foucault 1980, 331)

The quintessential approach to the problem of the subject-power-truth relationship is the fundamental identity question "Who am I? What is the secret of my desire?" The question "Who am I? Who am I truly?" has, in Foucault's opinion, a Christian origin more than a Greco-Roman one. This formulation is brought to light by the invention of techniques and technologies of confession in ancient Christianity. Foucault tried to detach himself from the problem of identity thought as authenticity, not in the sense of setting the desire "free", because that would only replicate the old ways of submission, but in terms of practices of subjectivation. This problematization allows him to replace the question "Who am I?" with the question "How should I live?".

There is a major split between the authentic self and the modern subject. Foucault distinguishes between Greco-Roman ethics and Christian morality. For Foucault, ethics is the ensemble of approaches through which individuals elaborate their own conducts in relation to an intermediary and problematic space by way of which the subject obeys the moral laws, but not entirely. From this point of view there are two irreducible forms of relationship to the self: on the one side we have, in modernity, a form of objectivation of the subject, where the self becomes an object of knowledge. On the other side, in Ancient times we had an ethical subjectivation where the subject was considered through a permanent care of the self and the relationship to the self is structured within the distance of an accomplished piece of work. If in the modern era of subjectivation the constitution of the self as moral subject occurs in the form of an indefinite self-knowledge, in the Greco-Roman philosophy the subjectivation occurs in the form of the constitution of a just ethical self:

But the will to be a moral subject, the search of an ethics of existence meant in Antiquity an effort to claim your own freedom and to give a certain form to your

own life in which you can recognize yourself, others can recognize you and in which future generations might find an example. (Foucault 2001, 1550)

Greek ethics was not connected to the idea of duty as a form of law or as a form of practical reason, but it was understood more as a virtue and virtue was defined as a form of life. The lifestyle of a subject wasn't something given, but it was the object of an improvement, of an elaboration of the subject on itself. It was not conceived as a theoretical object, as an object for scientific knowledge, but more as the object of styling as "work of art". They weren't searching for abstract principles, but for solutions to concrete and immediate problems. In Antiquity the access to truth was conditioned by a *teckne tou biou*, meaning a technique of life, a technique to create existence. Only the transformation through exercises (*askesis*) and a continuous effort make the access to the truth possible. Nowadays, on the contrary, truth seems accessible to anyone. The methodology through which sciences operate and the use of logical methods allow the access to the truth, without having subjectivity as an essential factor in this process. In other words, unlike the contemporary era where the method and content of a sentence are what truly matters, in Antiquity the criterion of truth was to be found in the ethos of the subject. So, in Ancient times, acknowledgement of truth in a sentence was given by adequacy between the acts and the words:

I came to it from the old, traditional question, which is at the very heart of Western philosophy, of the relations between subject and truth, a question which I posed, which I took up first of all in classical, usual, and traditional terms, that is to say: on the basis of what practices and through what types of discourse have we tried to tell the truth about the subject? Thus: on the basis of what practices, through what types of discourse have we tried to tell the truth about the mad subject or the delinquent subject? On the basis of what discursive practices was the speaking, laboring, and living subject constituted as a possible object of knowledge (*savoir*)? This was the field of study that I tried to cover for a period. And then I tried to envisage this same question of subject/truth relations in another form: not that of the discourse of truth in which the truth about the subject can be told, but that of the discourse of truth which the subject is likely and able to speak about himself, which may be, for example, avowal, confession, or examination of conscience. This was the analysis of the subject's true discourse about himself, and it was easy to see the importance of this discourse for penal practices or in the domain of the experience of sexuality. This theme, this problem

led me, in previous years' lectures, to [attempt] the historical analysis of practices of telling the truth about oneself. (Foucault 2011, 3)

Etymologically, *parrhesia* means to verbalize everything. In the beginning, Foucault analyses *parrhesia* within the direction of Greek and Roman consciousness. It designates the quality of the observer of consciousness which can verbalize freely and bravely the entire truth with the purpose of transforming the ethos of the observed one. In this sense, it is different from the obligation of telling the truth about oneself as it is for the system of Christian confession. In Christianity, the one who's talking, the one who's subjecting himself is the observed one and not the one observing. Foucault will proceed in analyzing the history of *parrhesia* starting with Socrates' ironical discourse until the provocative ironies of the Cynics. As I have previously said, the main characteristic of *parrhesia* is courage. This is a form of producing truth through which everything is bravely, honestly and bluntly verbalized. *Parrhesia* means a risk for both the person who is giving the discourse but also for the person who is listening to it and who necessarily connects the words to the person saying them. Truth in *parrhesia* does not need to be searched within the speech, in its content, but in the effects that truth has for the receiver, as well as for the speaker. Speech is neither limited to its rational structure nor to the correspondence between phenomena and communication. How could we understand the idea that truth structures freedom through the obligation of saying everything?

How and to what extent is the obligation of truth – the “binding oneself to the truth,” “binding oneself by the truth and by truth-telling” – at the same time the exercise of freedom, and the dangerous exercise of freedom? How is [the fact of] binding oneself to the truth (binding oneself to tell the truth, binding oneself by the truth, by the content of what one says and by the fact that one says it) actually the exercise, the highest exercise, of freedom? (Foucault 2010, 67)

This risk is opposed to performative discourse in the sense that the performative is confined by the institutional structures. *Parrhesia* has more to do with theater than with the performative. As long as we are playing a role, this can be a role only if we assume it until the end, completely, even running the risk of dying. Simultaneously, this

dramaturgy of truth is never played in solitude, because in *parrhesia* one always finds the other, so that the existence of both the receiver and the speaker are bound to modify.

Precisely this will of telling the truth at all costs is capable of really transforming the identity of the subject, his way of being and it opens him up to a constitution of the self which is never complete. In the course *Hermeneutics of subject* from 1982 at Collège de France, Foucault relativizes the Socratic imperative of self-knowledge in favor of the care of the self. The notion of *parrhesia* will be studied in a strong connection with the care of the self, so that within the pressure of "having to tell the truth about oneself" the figure of *parrhesia* profiles itself as an obligation of telling the truth about oneself. The indispensability of *parrhesia* appears not only in Christianity, but also in the ancient school of thought. It is the essential characteristic of the master of existence in the act of guidance. Foucault distinguishes between two distinct forms of spiritual direction. Firstly, we find the Christian governance of the souls. Secondly, he talks about the Hellenistic practice of the self. Within the Christian governance of the souls the relation of the subject with the truth takes place under the form of confession. Within the confession techniques, the individual becomes the subject-object of truth as an indefinite search of oneself and the subject is compelled to verbalize an exhaustive truth. The confession also presupposes an unconditional submission (*obeissance*) towards the Other. This is also the matrix of the relationship to the self, the basis on which the Western subject, the modern subject is formed. Unlike the direction of the Christian consciousness, the Hellenistic direction of existence has the autonomy of the disciple as its purpose, the freedom of the subject, more than his closure in a perpetual hermeneutics of a hidden self. In the Hellenistic and Roman practices of existence, the sentence of truth is not important for its theoretical content. The objective is not self-knowledge or knowledge of the world, but the assimilation of discourses of truth which have as an objective the confrontation of the facts of life and the importance of acting in the right way. Moreover, in the direction of the Hellenistic and Roman existence, the objective is not that of verbalizing the truth about oneself but, with the help of the master of existence, there has to be a proof of "knowing oneself", with the precise purpose of

verifying the correspondence between words and facts. The practices of the self should form our existence, to put it in action and not break the subject. In Antiquity, unlike Christianity and the modern times, there is a different relation with the Other.

The Other is called upon not to listen to the secrets of individuals, to their deepest hidden desires, but to help the individual come out of the *stultitia*. *Parrhesia* is ultimately on the master's side, having as only purpose the production of effects of truths on the way of being of the subject and the transformation of the subject's ethos. The observer of existence needs to help the integration of the discourse of the disciple in order to allow him an adequate relation from the self to the self. Foucault analyses *parrhesia* starting from two series of antinomies: on the one hand, *parrhesia* opposes confession and allows Foucault to establish a point of rupture between the antique and the Christian self. On the other hand, *parrhesia* opposes rhetoric and flattery. *Parrhesia* is a quality of the master in order to teach the other to properly take care of himself. There is a difference in the relation with Christian consciousness: in the psychological relation, the master plays the essential role, not the disciple. He must have a direct, simple and engaged speech which contains a personal conviction. He also presupposes total devotion towards what's being said and guaranteed by the perfect harmony between acts and speech. In this case, truth authenticates behavior. The major difference regarding the relation of the subject with truth between Christianity and Greco-Roman practices of the self is that while in the first case we have subjective division, in the second we have the consolidation of a strong self. The Christian practices presuppose self-interpretation, while truth is thought as being hidden. In addition to this, the search for truth is done out of obligation. These practices of subjectivation rather involve the renouncing of the self, they include a perpetual hermeneutics of the self, of desire. On the contrary, in the Greco-Roman practices it is about giving an account of the constitutive force of the way of being of the subject under the form of a principle of action. The constitution of the self is done without supposing a hidden identity, an immutable truth or any profoundness. It is not about hermeneutics, but about playing the game, it is not about giving up, but about exposing, putting yourself in danger. Without compulsion towards the civil law, without religious

constraint, but personal choice, it is a choice regarding the form we want to give to our existence. We can say that the subject is transformed by and through truth, in other words truth becomes practical ethos. Foucault opposes *parrhesia* to flattery and rhetoric. In contrast to *parrhesia*, the flatterer uses the language not to obtain effects of truth in order to act, but in order to get some advantages. The flatterer, unlike the *parrhesiast* uses deceitful speech as to put the receiver in a state of addiction, making him believe something else about himself, creating a false image of himself. This is why flattery hinders self-knowledge, the authentic self-constitution. The flatterer has a discourse that is different from the person to which he addresses, a speech that tries above all to adulate the speaker. But *parrhesia*, in contrast to flattery, can indicate a more important political form. It is about counseling of the prince, a very important problem in the political domain of training the princes. The prince's counselor must never be a flatterer; on the contrary, he is to prove himself worthy of a sincere and brave speech. On the other side, the art of rhetoric or the art of persuasion is also different from *parrhesia*. If in the *parrhesiast* speech the truth we know and in which we believe is told and assured, in rhetoric we will try to gain some profit by directing our speech according to someone's desires. The difference between *parrhesia* and rhetoric is that rhetoric makes things believable, it builds false concepts, it performs under false precepts, unlike *parrhesia*. It's more about searching the other's agreement, the other's sympathy. The rhetorician's purpose is not the other's autonomy, but the other's addiction.

If in the *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, the French philosopher analyses mainly the *parrhesia* of the master during the process of the directing of consciousness, during his class of 1983 (on the courage of truth) it is the concept of political *parrhesia* which will be analyzed in particular. Political *parrhesia* is essentially understood as a public and risky form, which is conducted either by the orator in front of the citizens or the philosopher in front of the prince. One of Foucault's most original ideas is the question regarding the origins of *parrhesia*, which in the beginning is neither a spiritual technique, nor an ethical discourse, but first and foremost a political discourse. At its origins, *parrhesia* is a practice, a duty towards the city, strongly connected to the status of the citizen. This form of political *parrhesia* has four conditions of possibility:

first of all, in order to talk truthfully in a political context you need a political right, namely the right to speak. Secondly, we need to take into consideration the contradictory nature of the political game: besides the right to speak, the one who's talking needs to obtain a certain authority towards the others. The third condition refers to the fact that the speaker needs to tell the truth in his own name, the enunciation should be connected to the speaker, which means that he needs to be responsible and to identify himself. The fourth and last condition, without which political *parrhesia* is not possible is courage; *parrhesia* institutes the thing Foucault called the "*parrhesiast* pact": the speaker needs to have the courage to tell the truth in front of an auditorium, and the auditorium needs to have the courage to listen to this truth, a truth that is different from public opinion. This pact constitutes a moral condition of political *parrhesia*. *Parrhesia* is the courage of the truth manifested by the one who speaks, who enunciates the entire truth in his mind. In doing that he takes an indeterminate risk. But *parrhesia* is also the bravery of the receiver. He accepts as true the scandalous truth that is being told. In the political *parrhesia* Foucault initiates the analysis starting from the status of democracy. There is a fundamental relation between ethics and politics. For the Greco-Romans politics meant exposure, taking a risk and even exposure in front of the others. Foucault begins not only with the analysis of the formal conditions of democracy, like the balance of powers, the separation of powers, constitutional problems, but also with the practical analysis of the citizen's active engagements. According to Foucault, there is a paradox of democracy. The paradox of democracy is that in this form of government politics can only function if the citizens as subjects expose themselves to risk and are personally engaged in public affairs. Otherwise we only have a system of seducers. For Foucault, democracy is not just a form of government structured by formal principles, but first of all by practices. The originality of Foucault concerning the analysis of democracy is that it places the source of *parrhesia* not just in its ethical forms, not even in the forms of the direction of consciousness, but mainly in the public space. *Parrhesia* gives ground to the ethical domain in the moments of a crisis of democracy. It presupposes the free and public exercise of speech in the *Agora*, confronted with other opinions. It also involves a brave discourse

in front of the leader, in front of the prince. This is where we have the biggest problem of political counseling, in other words the problem of “governing” the prince’s soul. He must know how to lead himself right, in order to lead the others better.

Democracy also involves some essential characteristics: firstly there is *eleutheria* (freedom) – this can be national or *exterior* freedom (more precisely it is about the independence of each and every state in relation to the others); *inner* freedom (freedom vis-à-vis the tyrant, as unique governor of power) and the freedom of the citizen. Secondly, there is the *nomos* which defines the law and also the tradition, the constitution or the fundamental principle. Then there are the concepts of *Isonomy* understood as the equality before the law and *Isegoria* – equality of all in freedom of speech. Last but not least, authentic democracy involves *parrhesia*, meaning courage, the risk to tell the truth that every citizen takes on the battlefield. But this one presupposes a *polis* without tyranny, which means that the power is not imposed but on the contrary, this needs to be earned in the space of an agonistic confrontation within the city. *Parrhesia* in democracy presupposes that every citizen can have authority over the other, it

is this political risk of a discourse which leaves room free for other discourse and assumes the task, not of bending others to one’s will, but of persuading them. What is making use of this *parrhesia* within the framework of the city if not, precisely, and in accordance with what has just been said, handling, dealing with both *logos* and *polis*? *Parrhesia* consists in making use of *logos* in the *polis* – *logos* in the sense of true, reasonable discourse, discourse which persuades, and discourse which may confront other discourse and will triumph only through the weight of its truth and the effectiveness of its persuasion – *parrhesia* consists in making use of this true, reasonable, agonistic discourse, this discourse of debate, in the field of the *polis*. (Foucault 2010, 105)

In other words, authentic democracy, beyond the constitutional forms and principles, leaves space for the “agonistic” game, for relations of power. The paradox of democracy could be understood as follows: equality before the law (*isonomy*) is necessary to *parrhesia* and *in extremis* could be a real danger for democracy, the danger of an egalitarian system in which there exists a fundamental right of everyone to speak and the need to choose between those who are capable of

parrhesia, capable of governing the city. These people should have the courage of verbalization in the public space. This is how authentic democracy involves not only the constitutional formalism, but also the ethical characteristics of citizens. Authority develops through courage, risk, ethos, ethical differentiation in relation to the other citizens. This ethical differentiation is indispensable for an authentic democracy. There is a circularity between democracy and *parrhesia*: equality is the condition of possibility of *parrhesia* and *parrhesia* is the difference in democracy. The difference, *parrhesia*, could be endangered by democracy itself. The fragility of *parrhesia* in democracy is a result of both the principle of *isegoria*, of its juridical background, of the citizens' rights and of the differentiation, of power, from the actual political game of democracy. The problem could be therefore formulated as follows: how could we ensure the game of difference within democracy? This is firstly a brave speech that the speaker is giving in front of the citizens. *Parrhesia* opens an agonistic structure in democracy, so that there is no authentic democracy without the existence of a parrhesiast discourse, both risky and brave.

But it is impossible to have *parrhesia* outside a political system which does not offer the freedom and equality of speech to everyone. This is why the crisis of democracy is the sliding from the political sphere to the ethical one. During the crisis of the ethos of democracy it is not the *polis* that becomes the reference of *parrhesia*. For example Socrates, instead of using a political *parrhesia*, is aiming his speech towards the ethos of individuals, leading them to care for their own self. This care takes the shape of a therapy. In the work of Plato there are two irreducible matrices in thinking the care of the self: the first is the Alcibiades-matrix, where the care of the self has as its object the soul (*psyche*). The second is the Laches-matrix, where the care of the self has as its object life itself, the way of living (the *bios*). In Alcibiades, the object of the care of the self is the soul, considered as distinct from the body and here *parrhesia* is closely connected to the metaphysics of the soul. In Laches, the object of the care of the self is not the soul as a reality distinct from the body, but the way of living, the *bios*. In the two platonic dialogues – *Alcibiades* and *Laches* – Foucault finds the source of two important philosophical orientations: in *Alcibiades*, where Foucault sees the problem of the relation between knowledge of the self and care of

the self, the discovery of the self goes through the instauration of the self as an ontological reality separated from the body, a reality which explicitly designates as being the soul (*psyche*). The knowledge of the self takes the shape of a contemplation of the soul in itself, in the mirror of its own essence. In *Laches*, Foucault identifies a new aspect of the ethics of truth. This aspect, hidden by the history of philosophy, is the courage of truth.

Taking into account this distinction, Foucault draws the two lines of Western philosophical practice: on one side there is the *Alcibiades* paradigm, where philosophy is placed under the sign of the knowledge of the soul – a metaphysics of the soul; on the other side the *Laches* paradigm, where philosophy is defined as a way of living, as the art of stylistic existence, an art of existence. The Socrates moment is the moment when the techniques of life are intertwined with the pressure of a beautiful life. This connection is an aesthetics of existence through which life and truth are indexed to the aesthetics of existence. Starting from the study of *Laches*, of bravery as an ethical fundament of truth, of life as an object of attention, Foucault opens up the path for the study of Cynicism. Philosophy is thought as being the complete articulation between *parrhesia* and the way of life. In the practice of Cynics the production of truth is made in the form of life itself. The Cynic exposes the truth into the life (*bios*) under the shape of the scandal of truth. The Cynic is the one for which the attention for life will make the *parrhesia* to be entirely coextensive to life. The Cynic *parrhesia* is studied within the general background of the general *parrhesia*, as a consequence of a certain way of life.

Even so, this type of *parrhesia* is different from the Socratic model, as well as the Hellenistic one. In these models, *parrhesia* involves a subject who needs to demonstrate through the visible form of his existence the accordance between his words and his actions. In order to be a *parrhesiast*, we need to have harmony, an accordance between what we say and what we do. In this respect, *parrhesia* is a consequence of what we are. On the contrary, the Cynic *parrhesia* becomes one with life itself, it is coextensive to the visible form of existence. To be capable of *parrhesia* you need to free yourself of any obligation, of any engagement. The Cynic lifestyle represents an affirmation of life itself by means of the truth. By way of the radical elimination of anything superfluous and

useless, the Cynic takes to extreme the discourse of the truth. His endeavor is that of reducing life itself. Moreover, the relation between life and speech, between *bios* and *logos* is a relation of physical conformity, a corporeal one.

In this context, Cynicism, as a form of styling our existence, presents itself as a form of philosophy in which the way of life, the existence, the *bios* is a manifestation, an immediate “dramatization” of truth. The Cynic makes from the form of existence itself, from life, in its most material and actual sense, the immediate presence of truth. Verifying the principles of reason and of ethics, verifying them until the end, in the matter of life, this returns in order to produce the difference of another form of life. If for Plato true life (*alethes bios*) was not hidden, unconcealed, pure, unaltered, visible, independent, right, stable, etc., for the Cynics all these characteristics are taken to extreme: an open life becomes a life without conventions and impudent, a life in which the only interest is in the basic needs and in voluntary abnegation, a life which becomes vagrant. A fair life, according to the laws of nature is driven to animality. A stable and independent life, a life of self-control, open to the problems of others becomes a “militant” life, a life of battle, without rest, a life of fighting against oneself and for oneself, against the others and for the others.

Unlike the other philosophical schools in Antiquity that were dedicated to the training and education of a small number of privileged citizens so that they could lead a happy and independent life, the Cynics speak for everyone. They borrow the short way of gesture and public exercise. Their performances do not aim at teaching something or at educating someone. They have the purpose of showing the vices and defects of individuals and also of bringing to light the laws and institutions which make them possible. The life of the Cynics is a life we could call “militant”:

And this notion of militantism covers, it seems to me, many of the dimensions of that Cynic life which turns the beneficial sovereignty of the *bios philosophikos* into combative endurance... It seems to me that we have a somewhat different idea in the Cynics. This would be the idea of a militancy in the open, as it were, that is to say, a militancy addressed to absolutely everyone, which precisely does not require an education (a *paideia*), but which resorts to harsh and drastic

means, not so much in order to train people and teach them, as to shake them up and convert them, abruptly. It is a militancy in the open in the sense that it claims to attack not just this or that vice or fault or opinion that this or that individual may have, but also the conventions, laws, and institutions which rest on the vices, faults, weaknesses, and opinions shared by humankind in general. It is therefore a militancy which aspires to change the world, much more than a militancy which would seek merely to provide its followers with the means for achieving a happy life. If we are to talk of Cynic militancy, it is important not to forget the system to which it belongs, that it exists alongside many other forms of philosophical proselytism in Antiquity. But we should also recognize a particular form in this militancy: an overt, universal, aggressive militancy; militancy in the world and against the world. (Foucault 2011, 284)

How much truth can life incorporate? Truth is understood here as scission, refusal, provocation, the truth that everyone knows but no one tells – as exposure of lies. There are two great dimensions in Cynicism: the first is the usage of a tough, blunt and provocative speech and the second is a specific way of life – a life in solitude, a life of wandering, a public and voluntarily poor life. As I have already said before, life not thought becomes the fundamental condition of truth and the connection between life and truth takes the shape of scandal. The Cynic makes of his own life, of his own body – the provocative theater of truth.

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WHOLEHEARTEDNESS AND IDENTIFICATION.
FRANKFURT'S PROPOSAL

DIANA GHINEA¹

Abstract

In this paper I intend to discuss Harry Frankfurt's proposal of wholeheartedness and identification concerning an agent's way of making decisions. The text that I am going to both summarize and analyze is Frankfurt's article "Identification and Wholeheartedness", published in the volume *Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions* (1987). The author uses concepts such as *consciousness, reflexivity, first/high-order desires, decisive commitments, identification and wholeheartedness* in order to construct a system which might explain our decision making. I believe that while his system is a very complex one, it still lacks, at least with regard to the mentioned concepts, some clarification concerning the concepts it introduces, clarification which may help us understand better how his proposal really works.

My paper has three main sections: in the first section I present and analyze Frankfurt's proposal, in the second section I write down my personal perspective and in the third one I formulate the conclusions.

Keywords: identification, wholeheartedness, reflexivity, consciousness, emotions, responsibility, character.

I. Wholeheartedness and Identification

Frankfurt starts his text concerning the "mind-body" problem and he reveals a slight change in the usage of this expression that might help us understand better the way in which we look at the relationship

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between our body and the fact that we are conscious. I believe his approach is quite relevant taking into consideration the way in which both philosophy and psychology have changed throughout the years, referring to the “mind-body” problem as to the “consciousness-body” problem would be quite helpful.

Frankfurt uses the ideas of Jean Piaget and William James to conclude that mentality is no longer equated with being conscious:

The pursuance of future ends and the choice of means for their attainment are the mark and criterion of the presence of mentality in a phenomenon. (James 1983, 21)

[Psychology] is not the science of consciousness only, but of behavior in general... of conduct. [Psychology begins] when the organism behaves with regard to external situations and solves problems. (Brinquier 1980, 3-4)

There are unconscious phenomena (within human behavior) which prove that being conscious and mentality are not the same thing. But now the question arises: what is consciousness? We’ve established it is not mentality and generally it is supposed to be a characteristic unique for humans and “members of certain relatively advanced species” (Harry Frankfurt 1987, 158).

Frankfurt takes into consideration Antony Kenny’s proposal: being conscious means being able to discriminate:

I think that consciousness... is a matter of having certain sorts of ability. To be conscious is, for instance, to see and hear. Whether somebody can see or hear is a matter of whether he can discriminate between certain things, and whether he can discriminate between certain things is something that we can test both in simple everyday ways and in complicated experimental ways. (Kenny 1972, 43)

Now we further ask: what does it mean to discriminate? It would seem, at a first approach and maybe in the most general sense, that being able to discriminate is to be affected by different things in different ways. For example, if I am affected by the presence of my phone on the table next to me, it means I can discriminate; therefore I am conscious that my phone is there. If, on the other hand, my state is the same whether the phone is there or not (I see no difference between the initial state when my phone wasn’t there and the after state, when my mother

brought it and put it on the table), I am not conscious, because, I do not discriminate. The same goes for sounds, colors etc. – we have a different state for each and one of them, we respond differently to them.

The author discovers a problem here: even if we accept discrimination as a very important part of consciousness and we should definitely do that, it is not the way in which we think of consciousness: usually we contrast between being conscious and being unconscious (being asleep). But even when people, for example are asleep and they do respond to stimuli, they somehow discriminate. Otherwise, we could not wake them.

But here is where Frankfurt makes a very important distinction. If we take the notion of Kenny's consciousness, we end up saying that every entity is conscious: like the piece of metal which changes once the temperature changes (becomes hotter, colder, expands, contracts etc.). As long as discrimination (the ability to react differently to different objects) is the definition of consciousness, the piece of metal is conscious. Frankfurt emphasizes very well here that Kenny's view is too general and there is a difference between consciousness and causal isolation. Regarding the piece of metal, we talk about causal isolation, while consciousness in everyday use cannot be only discrimination.

What is missing then? The author proposes a very interesting feature, distinct from discrimination: *reflexivity*. Being conscious means on one hand that I respond differently to different stimuli, but it also involves that I *am aware* of those responses. The difference between me and the piece of metal when the temperature rises is not the fact that both entities respond to the stimuli (I sweat and the metal also raises its temperature). The difference is that I *am aware* of the response of my body towards the heat, I feel warm.

But it is still not enough, even if we add reflexivity to discrimination, to explain how consciousness arises and what makes it different from unconsciousness. All things considered, in everyday use we have a certain second level of awareness: firstly, we have a primary response and then secondly, we become aware of that primary response. According to Frankfurt, consciousness is self-consciousness.

Now, it is important to understand that self-consciousness in the sense in which Frankfurt makes reference to is "a sort of *immanent reflexivity* in virtue of which every instance of being conscious grasps not

only that of which it is awareness, but also the awareness of it.” (Frankfurt 1987, 161). In other words, he does not talk about consciousness of a self, a subject or ego, or consciousness that there is awareness. This reflexivity regards the consciousness awareness of itself. When I see the color green, I am in a way affected by it and I am aware that I see the color green as such.

This is where the first part of the text ends. On the second section, Frankfurt begins with yet another problem: what consciousness is *for*. As he himself admits, although we talk about it every day and we seem to behave with familiarity with it, we are incapable of knowing what consciousness is and whether it is indispensable to us. The author offers an adequate response: consciousness is essential to purposeful behavior. What does this mean? Reflexivity is our ability to do something about our own condition. We can respond to certain conditions in a way in which our own interests are not affected. We have the possibility to avoid, ameliorate or even change certain circumstances, whenever our interests are in some danger – we act in a purposeful way, we make purposeful changes.

There is yet another characteristic of reflexivity or self-consciousness: this characteristic is unique to humans – we care about what we are. We constantly ask ourselves about what we wish to be and how other people see us, how they think of us. If we go even further, we will discover that there can be differences between our own desires: some of them motivate us because we want them to do so and some motivate us in spite of what we want. This specific part of Frankfurt’s text is quite tricky, because this rather simple idea, that sometimes we act and yet we do not “wholeheartedly” want to be motivated to act as we do, lays down the plan for the ideas he is going to present in the next sections. If we accept this, it becomes clear that we are somehow passive regarding our own actions – we end up by not endorsing our own motives. What we want – the object of motivating desire and the desire itself may actually not be something that we *really* want.

It seems a little bit awkward up to this point, but in section III Frankfurt tries to make his point clearer. How do we get to use this model of his for everyday use and what does it actually imply? First, we remind ourselves, as we saw in the two sections above that he uses

self-consciousness or reflexivity. Here is where we have his schema: there are the lowest first-order desires to perform one action. The first-order desire which actually leads to actions is, "by virtue of effectiveness" (Frankfurt 1987, 164), designated to the will of the person who actually has this desire. Moreover, people have second-order desires which directly concern what first-order desire they want and in the same way, second-order volition for this type of desires. In other words, we have two different levels of desires and volition or apparently even higher degrees, which, according to Frankfurt, make it natural and even easy to understand that sometimes there is a certain incoherence into a person's volitional aspects.

Let's take an example. Frankfurt proposes a smoker, but it may easily be said to apply to any sort of addicted person. If someone wants to restrain himself from drinking, one has a higher degree desire to restrain himself from drinking. But, even if that happens, his desire to drink is so strong (and here is where we are talking about first-order desire: the first desire which makes him drink something) that he ends up doing the opposite thing of his own volition. At this point there is an inconsistency between a person's higher-order volition concerning what desires he chooses and his first order-desires – as long as the latter proves itself to be more effective, moving him to act.

In this type of situations, where there is a clear lack of harmony between what a person *really* wants and does emphasize the fact that a person's will is not under her own control, somehow she does something she definitely does not want to do, an external force imposes her to behave in a certain way – her actions lack wholeheartedness.

But there is yet another sort of incoherence, when we may observe the lack of wholeheartedness within a person's action. Frankfurt brings into the picture a sort of *inner conflict* – the person's ambivalence between higher order preferences. This is the case when a person is drawn *to* and also *from* the object she wants. Also, it may also be the case that an agent has a conflict between his own preferences, whether this conflict is manifested or not. Either way, there is no unequivocal answer, apparently, to the question: what does the person really want?

So, to draw a conclusion we have two types of incoherence, both concerning the lack of wholeheartedness: the one in which we had the

example with an addicted person, someone who is compelled by an *external* force to act in a certain way (these forces are external in the sense that the person does not identify them to his volition complex and does not want her behavior to be in any way determined by them). The second type of incoherence concerns *internal* forces – the person comes to be ambivalent about her own preferences, something within her is not in harmony and she does not know what she truly wants.

Frankfurt believes that this type of model that he presented, based on hierarchical structure of desires, helps us understand better how an agent is passive to his own actions due to his own desires (take the example of the smoker once again). Moreover, it seems that we get to explain some concepts like weakness of the will, ego-ideal and so on. But, keeping all this in mind, there is still one important issue that we need to look at: how does a reflective creature, with second-order desires be wanton in respect to them in contrast to an unreflective creature concerning her first-order desires? The author brings back the notion of reflexivity which he emphasized earlier, because the hierarchy he just presented it is simply not enough.

In having different levels of desires, we fail to explain how someone gets to be identified with one or another of them. In other words, when we add different levels of desires, we do not solve the problem of how a person becomes defeated by her own desires, how she fails to act wholeheartedly. The only thing that this hierarchical model does is to add more soldiers to an existing war.

In the fourth section of the text, Frankfurt tries somehow to solve the problem which he himself and also other philosophers like Gary Watson have pointed out:

Since second-order volitions are themselves simply desires, to add them to the conflict is just to increase the number of contenders. (Watson 1975, 218)

Here is where he introduces the notions of “decisive commitment” and “resonance effect”. In order to explain these new concepts, he uses an example, which I will now analyze.

We have a student who is trying to solve a problem of arithmetic, which requires a calculation. The student may perform the calculation

once, twice and one hundred times more in order to check if he got the correct answer. As long as we presume that a mistake can always be made at a certain point and then some mistakes can even be repeated, when does our student stop? What makes him say, at one moment in time, that he got the correct answer and no further calculation are necessary?

Here is where we are confronted with two main options: the first is that our student gets bored, loses interest or is just distracted by something. He wants to sleep, to eat and he behaves like a wanton: he does not choose a result, neither he endorses one, he is completely indifferent with it. The second one is the one which really interests us: he puts an end to his sequence of calculation because *he decides, for some reason*, to do it. The reasons may be different: he is confident that this is indeed the right answer, or the cost for further inquiry is greater than reducing the possibility of error by repeating the calculation on and on again. No matter what stands behind his decision, what is important is the fact that he made a *decisive identification*.

Frankfurt explains this decisive identification is an unreserved commitment that adopting the view (in this case choosing one particular answer) is a very reasonable alternative. Our student anticipates that in the future, each time he makes this calculation the answer will be the same one. When a commitment seems to be the same for any time in the future, it means that it is *decisive*. Decisive means no reservation, it means that the person who made that specific commitment is 100% sure that no matter how further she goes with the inquiry, the result will always be same. In the case of the student, once we made a decisive commitment, he strongly believes that no matter how many other calculation he makes, the answer will be the one he had already chosen. This is what Frankfurt calls "the resonance effect".

How do we relate this example with the problem of desires? The author makes a very interesting proposal: in both cases, arithmetic and desires, a person decides to put an end to a certain sequence in a not arbitrary way, at a certain point, where she sees no conflict. Maybe the person has no doubt; maybe she sees no reason to continue as long as this particular result is a quite good one. On the contrary, if an agent gets to this moment and decides to continue, even if a potentially good answer is provided, he would confront himself with a conflict. When we

put an end to a sequence of reflections concerning our own desires because we have no conflict or doubt it is not an arbitrary decision. It is a reasonable one, one which needs to be taken. Is there any arbitrariness left? Frankfurt says that as long as every time we employ a principle we are presented to the possibility of error, no arbitrariness is impossible. The best thing that we can hope for is to reduce it as much as we can.

I find the fifth section of the text rather puzzling and also extremely interesting. Here is where I believe that Frankfurt introduces some intriguing ideas. He states that once a person has made a decision between two different desires, once she has chosen a side to be on, she identifies with that particular desire. A person may not be responsible for a certain desire which occurs within her, but responsibility comes along once that a person makes that desire her own, it becomes what she really wants.

The author talks about two types of conflicts between desires: first we have the competition for priority (which desire to satisfy first). Once we solved this conflict, we are faced with a single ordering; each desire is integrated to occupy a specific position. The second conflict means separation of desires – one of them gets to be treated as an intruder. So, we order, integrate, separate and reject desires – these acts are the ones which govern our inner life.

In contrast to Aristotle, for Frankfurt the responsibility of an agent has to do with a person *taking responsibility for her own characteristics*. A person is to be responsible not for having characteristics, but with identifying with them. If I am to choose between two opposite desires which are in conflict and I indentify myself with it, I choose it, I take its side, and it is what I want. The conflict between these two desires may never be over, but the fight is now between something I choose to be, I identify myself with and the other.

I find this particular part of the text interesting, because it shifts from that hierarchy of desires to responsibility and identification with one's desire. We shift from desires in conflict to a person (which identifies herself as a desire) and another desire. It is interesting to see the way in which Frankfurt proposes at this stage such a change, but it is rather puzzling. It doesn't seem so clear how an agent gets to be identified with his own desires. We order, integrate, separate, reject and then somehow we identify with one. As innovative as this rather complex system looks like, it is not an easy mechanism to employ.

The sixth section concerns with “reflexivity of deciding” (Frankfurt 1987, 174) – deciding is an action done to oneself (an agent decides to decide things in a certain way). Here is where Frankfurt talks about the meaning of “making up a decision”. This is where we find out that the only thing decision makes is to create an intention, without any guarantees of being carried out. The author states that a person can always change her mind and even if agents make decisions in order to solve a conflict and become an “integrated whole” (Frankfurt 1987, 174) that conflict is always there. If a person does not succeed to integrate herself, to solve the conflict it was intended to solve, we are again confronted with a lack of wholeheartedness. In spite of the agent’s decision, the conflict is still there, because he has other intentions, even if he is aware of that fact or not.

The seventh and last section answers an apparent question which the last section raised for us. Why do we make up our minds at all? A function of decision is both to guide other preferences and decisions in the future time and also to form the hierarchical structure of the person’s identity (structure which was previously discussed). Frankfurt talks about the function of decision as integrating the person both *dynamically* (coherence and unity of purpose for the future decisions and actions) and *statically* (the reflexive and hierarchical structure).

In either ways, one thing becomes clear: an agent is seeking, through decision making, to solve or avoid a conflict. One person identifies herself with motives and desires and here is where wholeheartedness comes along. Whenever we make a decision, we perform an action, whose performance includes reflexivity, desires and volitions of higher order. Frankfurt finishes his text by saying that making a decision seems rather different from knowing how to implement it, but it is rather unclear how we accomplish the latter by first accomplishing the former in the same structural way.

II. Personal Perspective

As far as I’m concerned, I believe that Frankfurt’s text is a very interesting one. Firstly, because it discusses the idea of hierarchical

desires, in order to explain some of the actions we usually believe and even say to be done by us, but in such a way that we do not accept them as “entirely” ours. This is how a person in a certain situation behaves, when being asked about a certain action performed by her: “why did you do such and such?” In everyday life her answer is either: “I couldn’t stop myself” or “I’ve done this and it seemed to me that I wasn’t the person who was actually doing it”.

But, as appealing as this structure may seem, I think that maybe something is missing, even when we take into consideration everything that Frankfurt pointed out (discrimination, reflexivity, first or high – order desires). This structure, as complex as it may look and also be, it fails, in my perspective, to give a clear account of what “identifying oneself with a desire” means. Wholeheartedness and identification are closely related and we cannot have one without the other. The problem arises when I try to understand and clarify what identifying with my desire really presupposes.

If I, as a smoker, have two different desires, both of them being of a second-order and I clearly state that I do not want to smoke anymore starting tomorrow, I identify myself with this desire. Once I have done this, does it mean that I accept this desire as being mine or being what I really want? And even if this is the case and this simple explanation is the exact answer, do I do this every time I need to decide? Is this structure generally accepted for every situation I find myself in? Or maybe it is only with certain desires, the ones from a higher-order? Do first-order desires function the same way or not?

Let’s take this idea further. We think of addicts all the time and maybe they are really the best example. But, in reality, a true addict rarely understands the state he is in. He may actually accept that yes, he has a problem and most likely he or she should stop. What good does that do to the person? Most of the time, none whatsoever. In so many cases in real life, a true addict ends up being helped by others understand his problem – his identification with that high-order desire – to quit smoking, drinking or taking drugs – comes as a result of a punishment (the authorities) or even a necessity (the person is in danger of losing something very important to her – family, friends etc.)

My question here for Frankfurt is this: how does this type of addict identify himself with his high-order desire? Can this agent really ever

say that this is what he wants? Or what others want for his own "good"? Who is able to say that? Maybe we answer by saying that his instinct of self-preservation should be stronger than his desire to slowly kill himself. But, a real addict admits that his addiction doesn't allow this instinct to make place in his life. The only important thing for him is to keep taking or doing whatever he is doing. So, does the agent identify himself or the other people around him do that? Do we still have responsibility for his own characteristics as long as the agent needs help (usually therapy)? Moreover, we should never forget that in the case of a person who is an alcoholic, for example, the need for alcohol will never go away (some of them drink everyday because their bodies do not function otherwise).

One conclusion up to this point is that addicts are a very good example, but also they represent a very good counterexample. When is this identification with one's desire really there? What role do other people play and in which way are we still taking about the agent's responsibility for his own characteristics?

We can think of integration as the requirement of an agent to exercise his will and of condition of personhood and there is a very interesting connection with responsibility as Frankfurt pointed out. Actions can be passive, but they are nonetheless causally relevant and someone's responsibility becomes his approval of said characteristics and dispositions.

What I am trying to point out, by giving these examples and discussing these cases is that Frankfurt's proposal, though interesting and also relevant in quite many situations, has some serious issues concerning his main concepts. It is not easy to talk about responsibility, reflexivity or identification, especially in philosophy. This particular text focuses on finding a solution for our actions, when it seems to us that we are not the ones doing them. Our own desires seem not to be ours, because we wouldn't normally behave in certain ways. But I here return to addicts: they behave as they like. Many of them admit to having a problem, but they are feeling happy and even distracted from many problems. A lot of them also manage to do things normal people (and by "normal" I mean people who are not addicts) do not do: write, sing, etc. and most of the times quite well. It is the societies which make them

change and seek help – our reasons, though important, should represent a problem here. Why? It seems to me that in situation like these, when we try to make others understand that what they are doing is wrong, and they should “listen” to their high-order desires, the idea of wholeheartedness is tricky and questionable.

I do not intend to raise an ethical question which could take us too far. I only want to suggest that although relevant, identification with one’s desires, a concept so important for Frankfurt’s wholeheartedness, it is rather complicated. It fails to explain those examples which need a reasonable understanding in the first place. And yet, maybe at some point, we will be able to find the answer we need.

Even under the interpretation I have presented above, I do not think that the author is completely clear about the questions asked. Moreover, there is one point in the sixth section of the text, where Frankfurt states that a person needs to become an “integrated whole” in order to solve a conflict and to discuss about wholeheartedness. The same problem here as I noted above: how do we become a whole? What does this mean? The idea of wholeheartedness does not fail to offer good perspectives for further explanations of how we make decisions between our own desires. In spite of this fact, we need more clarification concerning the way in which we make these decisions. Identifying with oneself is an interesting expression, but in order to create and also consolidate such a system of volition, as the one that Frankfurt presents in this paper, we need more than interesting expressions. We should discover the way in which the mechanism works in most cases, rather than in some and why it is better than others. What makes it the relevant or the correct one?

III. Conclusions

Wholeheartedness means having a high order intention without doubt or some sort of conflicting intentions. Integration implies that an agent exercises his will; decisiveness means no reservation, nor doubt. If we add these concepts, at this stage of understanding and explanation from Frankfurt’s point, to reflexivity as a necessary condition for

consciousness, we have in front of us a complex system, whose aim could be, at a certain point actually achieved. How do we establish authority upon our own desires? This is a question that still needs an answer, as far as I'm concerned, because the author's view is lacking the clarity for a relevant explanation of how the mechanism works in at least most of everyday situations.

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DOES THE EPISTEMOLOGICALLY DIFFERENT WORLDS APPROACH BECOME A SOLIPSIST PHILOSOPHY AT THE END?

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Abstract

This paper treats the Epistemologically Different Worlds perspective, created by Gabriel Vacariu and presents a problem which the public may find at a first glance upon the theory: if there is no causal relationship between the mind and the body does this theory reduce itself to a sort of solipsism? My solution to this approach is multilayered: in the first approach I present the method employed by the philosopher while constructing his theory, showing that it is well grounded in the empirical sciences; the second approach consists of several pieces of content of his theory which seem to be designed to eliminate any form of suspicion; in the third and last approach I tackle the strong solipsist view which doubts the method and contents presented before, as well as the existence of an “outside world” by arguing that it is more beneficial to adopt, if not the EDWs perspective, at least any other.

Keywords: Epistemologically Different Worlds, paradigm, solipsism, method.

For some time now, Gabriel Vacariu has been working on a new paradigm, meant to satisfy the problems and directions in today’s scientific struggles. As with most good ideas, it began to be considered by more and more people and I believe it will continue to gain recognition as time passes. Therefore I have taken upon myself to treat if just an inch of the theory in this article, in order to facilitate the understanding of his work.

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Upon hearing or reading at first glance about the Epistemologically Different Worlds² perspective, without a proper study of the subject beforehand, one may find some of its aspects queer. One such problematic issue seems to me the following reasoning: "If 'Being' is a EW and the body is an 'It' in the Macro-EW and there is no causal relation between the EDWs, then, do we not fall in solipsism?"

If one should perceive Vacariu's paradigm as presented above I believe it would have crippling effects as it would do the philosopher's work no justice at all. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the argument seems to put a possible reader in defense. Thus I shall discuss this problem throughout the article and present the arguments that should refute any such debate from occurring. In doing this, I shall evoke three types of arguments: the ones that are based on the method that the philosopher employed in order to create his paradigm, showing that he could not "lose the world" as he does not have a pure top-down approach, but rather stays well grounded in experience since he systematically draws information from the empirical and theoretical sciences; the ones that are based on the theory itself, such as the rules he imposes and the way this paradigm divides the world as we know it, since some of them are designed to ensure the exact same grounding and the fact that there is more than one mind out there; and the skeptical argument, showing that even if one should cut the causal relation between the mind and the body, it wouldn't necessarily cause his or her theory to become a solipsist one, since there is just enough reason to adopt this view as there is to adopt the exact opposite, while the non-solipsist one I would find to be a much more sensible and productive approach.

Before I start my argumentation, it should be noted that this problem is not the most striking one. That is to say, Vacariu's paradigm presents a lot of problematic aspects, like the lack of causality between the micro particles and the macro particles (as they belong to EDWs), or the equivalence between epistemology and ontology. I believe that these aspects are discussed at length by Vacariu in his books and I do not wish to reiterate his arguments without just cause. I may appeal to them, however, where it so suits my own argumentation.

² Further on I shall use Vacariu's abbreviation for this: EDWs.

I. The Method Argument

It is my belief that in order to lose the world and the minds outside one's own, the enquirer must start from the very basic ontological presumptions and work his way down to reality. A top-down approach seems to me impossible to carry through. There have been several trials, but I think that the audience would find (and did find) them unsatisfying for today's scientific and day-to-day requirements. Let me remind the reader of the Cartesian approach, as it seems the most well-known. In this sense, the well-known "Cartesian Circle" seems to stand tall and still occupy the minds of philosophers to this day. I do not wish to go into details, but it would seem that doubting one's sensory information to the point of removing it completely from knowledge leaves the skeptic with a huge problem. Let me just point out the fact that the famous "I think, therefore I am" could be further doubted to « x does something, thus y exists », where y may be x, which would ultimately leave the thinker with « x does something ». Furthermore, to appeal to a higher entity for certainty was acceptable in Descartes' day, but today I believe one should not rely on any such improvable facts. From my viewpoint, the fact that some philosophers came to understand the Cartesian Circle via a psychological approach, rather than a rational one³, seems to show the problems a thinker may run into if he or she adopts a top-down approach to explaining the world.

Let me now point out the fact that Vacariu's view does not start from his postulate that epistemology is the equivalent of ontology, but rather arrives at it through the analyses of applied sciences combined with I. Kant's transcendentalist philosophy: "In fact, the EDWs perspective represents an extension of the Kantian transcendental philosophy [...]." (Vacariu 2010, 17). Thus, the philosopher starts from the three constituents of the Kantian epistemology:

- i) The subject – observer of the interior, as well as of the exterior;
- ii) The conditions of observation (or of having something);
- iii) The object to be observed. (Vacariu 2010, 17).

³ For further reading concerning this approach, I suggest Loeb, Louis E. (1992). "The Cartesian Circle". *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*. Ed. J. Cottingham. Cambridge University Press.

Having these three notions in mind, he shifts his attention to Bohr's dilemma, who sustained the fact that if the conditions of observation are changed, what appears to be the same entity will have different determinations. This problem emerges clearly from the wave – particle problem: "We recall Bohr's principle of complementarity: we cannot observe the wave and the particle using the same measurement apparatus at the same time." (Vacariu 2010, 265). Under these circumstances Vacariu effectuated his shift, explaining the ontological differences (the entity's determinations) which appear due to the epistemological changes (the conditions of observation). He will propose the unity of the two conceptions, which is to say: To change the conditions of observation means to change the object's determinations. But how can an epistemological change affect the ontology of an entity? It must be said that this change does not enact itself only on the morphology or the appearance of an entity, but it also applies on its whole activity, as the entity will have a whole new action pattern. Moreover, the entity will start interacting with different entities than before the epistemic change. Therefore, one may say that if an epistemic change causes an ontological change, then the epistemology – ontology difference is wrong.

Judging by the aforementioned thought process, one may conclude that Vacariu's first postulate does not come from a pure internal viewpoint, since, although his starting point is Kant's transcendental philosophy, his next step is applying it to the empirical findings of scientists. In fact, if one would take an interest in Vacariu's view of the Kantian philosophy, the reader would notice the following: "It has been shown that Kant's perspective is wrong from a theoretical point of view (by the mathematical construction of the non-Euclidian geometries) and empirically (through Einstein's general theory of relativity). Non-Euclidian geometries and Einstein's physics do not involve human perception." (Vacariu 2008, 98). Again, from this quotation comes clearly the idea that one must validate his or her presumptions through the findings of the sciences.

Pressing on, after the merging of ontology with epistemology, Vacariu points out the fact that in order to be, to have and to know one must interact with the object. Since people are not the only entities that exist, all knowledge and existence are depersonalized: "Human beings

are not the only entities that observe (interact with) other entities.” (Vacariu 2011, 29). That is to say that he will merge “to be” with “to know” and he will get “to interact”. Interaction assures an entities existence and its determinations. After he points out that from this point onward the notion of essence becomes void, he returns to Bohr’s problem and states the fact that not all its/Its⁴ interact. Of course, for any interaction to occur, any two entities must be in a [(spatio-) temporal] framework⁵, which would lead the author to his signature EDWs. It would seem to me that this point stresses enough the lack of a solipsist approach on the world. The way Vacariu moves back and forth between the most abstract principles and the most empirical of problems even from the beginning should testify to the philosopher’s intentions of not ever losing the ground from underneath his feet.

It should also be noted that Vacariu’s approach on the subject is not only a constant passing from interiority to exteriority but also from a top-down approach to a bottom-up one. The reasons would be the same as mentioned before, but this point would be of interest to a philosopher of science as the debate between these two approaches has lasted long enough. It is my conviction that whether one is a philosopher looking for metaphysical, ontological or epistemological answers to the world, trying to build a more coherent *Weltanschauung*, or a scientist, trying to figure out the laws of nature, one cannot adopt a strict direction of study. Thus, either one of the aforementioned thinkers must take on both approaches if they are to accomplish any sensible achievement. As noted by Einstein, although the role of the theoretical physicist is to emit principles and deduce their consequences, these must be extracted from nature: “The scientist must rather steal in a way from nature those

⁴ Its stands for living entities whereas its non-living entities, stands for, as noted by Vacariu.

⁵ The reason I wrote spatio-temporal in brackets is that, for example, Being does not have any spatial determinations. Moreover, it could be speculated that there exist EWs which do not possess either determination. Having this in mind, I considered the needs of the reader that is not immersed in the EDWs paradigm and, in order to facilitate the understanding of the framework, I felt the need to mention the two best known determinations of the Macro-EW.

general principals which can be precisely determined, as he can identify certain general traits in bigger compounds of facts of experience.” (Einstein 1996, 15-16) Moreover, he continues with: “I have noticed that inductive physics asks questions to the deductive one and the deductive asks the inductive, and also the fact that the answer to these questions needs the straining of all forces.” (1996, 18). Having the testimony of a paradigm builder alongside the writing of M. Friedman, who studied the epistemology of science, who also concurs in his *The Dynamic of Reason* that the process through which one may build a scientific paradigm is a combination of bottom-up⁶ with top-down⁷, I would concur that one cannot build a sustainable paradigm through a metaphysical or ontological intuition or revelation and deduction, without having a close look at the world.⁸ Since Vacariu’s paradigm seems to gain influence bit by bit, I should dare say that he does not lose track of the scientific facts along the way, but rather that he constructed his theory through careful consideration of both the philosophical issues and the scientific ones. Thus, since I believe I have shown that through his method, the philosopher stays grounded in actual empirical sciences, fact that proves his method to be an adequate one for his task, I shall continue my argumentation with some in-theory ideas which would sustain the opposite of solipsism.

II. The Theory Argument

At the beginning of this section I would like to point out some aspects of Vacariu’s EDWs perspective. From my point of view, his theory should be seen as follows:

⁶ From the raw facts of nature to the metaphysical intuition.

⁷ From the metaphysic principles to the explication of the world through mathematics.

⁸ It should be noted that in today’s world, one cannot know all there is about the world as such. Thus, for the creation of a paradigm, a scientist should have a look at the current beliefs in philosophy so that he or she would not try to build from principles that have been shown to be wrong, and a philosopher should immerse in the latest scientific findings so that he won’t build an expired or useless paradigm.

- i) The first principle (Epistemology = Ontology) and its consequences which have been presented in the second chapter of this article;
- ii) The Hyperontology⁹ which contains the second principle (The EDWs are.) and all that follows this principle;
- iii) The Hyperrules¹⁰;
- iv) The third principle, which presupposes a paradox and its consequences.¹¹

If one considers this division, the whole paradigm becomes more easily understandable. This, however, is not the division which the author necessarily employs in his books, but, for the sake of clarity, I urge the reader to keep it in mind when immersing his or herself in the theory. Having these things covered, let me point out the most striking aspects of the paradigm which should convince the reader that the EDWs perspective is not a solipsist one.

The first piece of content I would like to use has been actually presented to the reader in the previous chapter. It is the first Hyperrule and it states that: "Humans are not the only entities that observe (interact with) other entities." (Vacariu 2011). From my perspective this is more of a consequence of the first principle rather than a rule, but nonetheless, it should be noted that the author dehumanizes knowledge. It would seem to follow the whole process of decentralizing the human being from the centre of the universe started by Copernic, Darwin and Freud, whose theories not only move the humans out of the centre of the

⁹ Through Hyperontology one should understand the ontology that treats all the EDWs as a whole, not each one in particular. This being said, one should tread carefully, as all the propositions are deduced, since no one can study all the EDWs simultaneously. The reason behind this is that, on one hand, attention is a serial process which limits our interaction with only one it/It or group of its/Its at a time and, on the other hand the fact that one must change the conditions of observation depending on the EW one studies.

¹⁰ This notion has been designated by Vacariu. Again, the reason behind it is that these rules are to be kept when crossing from one EW to another and when doing the Hyperontology.

¹¹ I consider this to be the ontology if the reader would allow me to use this term, as it has been removed from the theory itself. This part mostly consists in fact about Being since the philosopher also has extensive knowledge in cognitive neuroscience.

world, but also move their own centre. (Rorty 1991, 142). It should also be noted that through this rule we guarantee the fact that humans do not instate the EDWs but rather the very own its and/or Its and their interactions do that, thus avoiding a solipsist view.

I will only mention the next two Hyperrules for they do not necessarily help the argumentation, but their importance seems to force me to at least draw attention to them:

The part-whole rule – “[...] the whole and the parts cannot exist in the same place at the same time. From the viewpoint of the whole (an It), the parts do not exist.” (Vacariu 2011, 54) and *the Kant-Carnap rule of containment* – “The extension of some notions/principles initially constructed within a scientific theory that explains the phenomena from a particular EW₁ to another theory that explains the phenomena from another EW₂ are, in general, empty concepts/principles.” (2011, 30). While the first of these two rules helps divide and identify different EDWs, the second helps their study, urging the scientists to be aware that while some notions/principles *may* apply in two EDWs, this does not mean one ought to mix them up and just dismiss them as being a single EW.

The last Hyperrule is called *the body-brain law of evolution*. This rule is adopted since evolution is an important fact which must be considered during the study of any It. Thus, Vacariu states: “The cell and the human being follow the same rules of evolution. Both entities have subjectivity and we can call the ‘subjectivity’ of each epistemological entity, in general, a subjectivity that is equivalent with the identity of each entity. We use the identity for external and non-living entities, while the subjectivity for the living entities. From the EDWs perspective, the interactions constitute the identity of non-living entities, while the implicit knowledge represents the subjectivity in living entities. Each living entity has an implicit knowledge that corresponds to the physical interactions inside the body and brain. Without this implicit knowledge, a living entity would not be able to survive in any environment. This implicit knowledge is the result of the evolution of living species.” (Vacariu 2010, 55-56). Having this taken into account, the author presents the rule: “The brain and body have evolved together in a non-decomposable, intermingled couple, but in order for the organism to survive, the brain-body couple has to correspond to the ‘I’.” (2010, 54).

Although this rule seems a little disappointing at first glance, its implications are of the utmost importance. For example:

- a) One cannot study either the Being or the It without taking into account the evolution of life;
- b) One cannot study either of them without taking into account the evolution of the individual during his lifetime.

As an example meant to sustain a), I would remind the reader about the implicit knowledge such as any and every biological processes which take place in an It, which has been developed through evolution. As for b), any of the explicit knowledge would do, such as walking or driving or speaking which have been learnt during the evolution of the individual.

The reader might have noticed the implications which this last rule has for my argumentation: One cannot consider oneself without an It (a body) and, more than that, one cannot consider any It without a Being. This rule seems to be the best piece of content for my anti-solipsist argumentation, as it guarantees that i) I have a body, and ii) Anyone I meet which is alive has a mind. One might object to this rule, though, in many ways: either by sustaining the reductionist perspective and saying that any knowledge we might have is in the brain and therefore it might all be just a body, for example, or by sustaining that I do not actually meet anyone and it is all in my mind. I shall not give any counter-arguments to the reductionist perspective as Vacariu discusses it at length in his books. Concerning the other perspective I will dedicate the next chapter to dealing with it a more or less satisfactory manner.

Either way, I would like to present to the reader another piece of content extracted from the paradigm which would deny the solipsist view. In the division I proposed earlier, the next important aspect of the theory would belong to the third principle – the postulation of the Being EW and its paradox: “Being is an entity and an EW at the same time.” (Vacariu 2011, 55). This paradox has been postulated because of several empirical problems like the fact that one cannot interact with his or her own mind or another person’s mind, the fact that cognitive neuroscience has been having some trouble with the localization of the functions that we can identify in our mind etc. In any case, the paradox assures us that any process or entity we would like to place in this EW becomes identifiable only on a conceptual level. In understanding this, one must

keep in mind the part-whole hyperrule. All these processes and entities become mental states. Also, it guarantees us that the Being has continuity in time. So, all the problems concerning the identity of the self and others as such become irrelevant since as long as one has any mental state, one is his or her own self. Concerning what one might attribute to the Being, life seems to be the most important aspect to this argumentation: "Mind (the subjectivity) and life have the same ontological status." (2010, 79). It should be noted that the author signals that nothing seems to interact with life, thus it cannot be attributed to any of the pre-EDWs perspective places¹² or any of the previously mentioned EDWs. He also studies the definitions of life and he finds the next two opinions to be the most spread: either life emerges from a cell or organism (2010, 79), or life is a process of the living organisms. (2010, 83). The first definition fails to satisfy Vacariu's paradigm, as emergence is a pseudo-concept which breaks the Kant-Carnap rule, while the second seems to be a tautology. Because of this, the author shall convey that life corresponds to a cell or organism and that it seems to be a kind of process. Even more so, the philosopher shall compare life to implicit knowledge since this too is a process of which we are unaware of activating and sustaining and, since we cannot interact with either of them, the author shall place life alongside knowledge in the Being¹³.

This position that life occupies in the EDWs perspective seems to help in my endeavor. The reason is that, again, if one should encounter an It, one must realize that it has a corresponding Being. Any living organism, be it unicellular or plant or a person will have a mind of its own since it has the corresponding process of life. Also, it should be noted that any organism will have a Being for as long as it is living. The EDWs perspective does not allow any Beings running adrift. Once the

¹² And by these places I refer to either what one would call the microcosm or the macrocosm.

¹³ It should be noted that Vacariu would not accept the phrasing "placed *in the Being*". This is due to the aforementioned paradox and the fact that Being has no spatial dimensions. The correct phrasing would be "Life is Being", or "Knowledge is Being". For the sake of clarity I shall try to refrain from adopting too much of the jargon employed by the philosopher.

organism dies, the Being that corresponded to that particular It will disappear into Hypernothing¹⁴. This stands to also prove the fact that although the Being is different from the body, it has nothing to do with the religious idea of a soul, as it does not linger after death.

After these few arguments presented in this chapter, I believe I have proven that there is no problem of the other minds, as it is called¹⁵. There is still the strong solipsist account that would state that maybe we do not have any access to anything exterior to our minds at all. Maybe all the mental images and sensations are purely imaginative. Although I consider that nobody would still hold this view, it is nevertheless part of the solipsist problem and I shall address it the best I can in the next chapter.

III. The Skeptical Argument

First of all, the reader should consider the strong solipsist view for a second. Let us imagine that we have accepted the EDWs perspective. Thus I am the Being that corresponds to my body. This Being is not causally connected to the body since one is an EW and the other one belongs to an EDW, the Macro-EW. Any sensation I have is melted in a mental state, alongside with all the processes I am unaware of such as every action it takes in order for me to breathe, or life itself. Moreover, at any given state I also have different emotions and thoughts. All of these are melted down into one indivisible mental state, since we know that the paradox does not allow us to take any process or entity that is placed within the Being to be taken separately except purely conceptually. This should, from the solipsist's perspective make me doubt any sensation I

¹⁴ Hypernothing is a term employed by the philosopher in order to designate the "space from between" the EDWs. It is very important to note that it is for pure conceptual reasons that the author uses this term, as it has no existence: between any two EDWs there is nothing but the conceptual relation of correspondence – no space, no time, nothing. It is called as such since it belongs in the Hyperontology section, because of the necessity of thinking of two or more EDWs at the same time.

¹⁵ This problem states that one cannot be sure whether anyone but him or herself has a mind of his or her own, or any "internal life" or "internal feelings" whatsoever, as one can never experience these other minds.

have. Moreover, since there is no (special-) temporal continuity between the Macro-EW and my Being, there should be a difference between when my sensory organs come into contact with a stimulus and when I perceive this within the Being.

Having this picture in mind, one should consider whether within this paradigm there is any chance of having any objective sensations. Since the Being is not causally connected to the Macro-EW, the altering of my mental state at moment t_1 into the mental state at t_2 is not caused by whatever stimuli my body is subjected to, but rather it is changing on its own without any cause whatsoever. How could I have any assurance that there exists anything other than the Being?

This seems to me to resemble somewhat the predicament in which Descartes found himself while employing the skeptical method. But alas, we cannot invoke any benevolent God which would grant us anything since in the EDWs, the benevolent, omnipotent, omniscient God cannot exist due to the very notion of attention which is a serial process: "As human attention is a serial process, the human subject cannot simultaneously observe EDWs." (Vacariu 2008, 113). If attention is a serial process and I cannot observe two or more EDWs simultaneously, how can I believe that there could be something as a being which is omniscient? The good part about this is that I do not face an evil spirit that would try and deceive me either, since nothing can interact with the Being. Therefore, if nothing changes my mental states and they just change on their own, why should I consider that Vacariu went astray anywhere along his reasoning? Is there anything that would make me rather consider the fact that I have imagined each and every bit of information generated by science with which I do or do not agree or any of the sensations I have experienced? Since I cannot find any reason to doubt all my experiences so far, I cannot find any doubt concerning the existence of a world outside my mind which is more or less the way it was portrayed by my mental states. If this is correct, then all I have to do is ensure myself that if I were to adopt or create a paradigm of my own I should pay attention to my line of reasoning so that I should not lose the world in the process. But I have already ensured myself of that via the argumentation in the second chapter of this article. Should I trust the data Bohr collected? Well, since experimental science has set its ground rules so that anyone

may reenact any one discovery in order to check that information, and since generally, except for the borderline cases, human beings tend to be alike, I believe I should trust them. And if, by any chance, they should turn out to be wrong, I believe I should try and build anew.

The reader may find this last part of my argumentation less rational and more emotional and optimistic. I believe this to be the correct approach, since the strong solipsist view seems to me to be a game, more of a psychological playground rather than a rational way of thinking, since, after one has accepted this line of thought, he or she should not speak or generally do anything since it would be pointless. What point would there be in me trying to convince the reader that you do not have a mind and you are just a figment of my imagination? Moreover, I believe any such skeptical exercises that go beyond the common sense, to be unproductive. If the world does not exist, why should I try to find out its natural laws when I could just make up some new ones? Thus, I conclude this chapter, since I feel that I have treated this most hilarious worldview as well as I could, demonstrating that if one is to accept the strong solipsist viewpoint, one could just as easily adopt the opposite, which, through centuries of scientific discoveries and some clear thinking would evolve in the EDWs perspective.

IV. Conclusions

In the end I would like to remind the reader that this article is not to be viewed as a development of the EDWs perspective and neither is it intended for the ones who have immersed themselves in the theory, but rather for those who know little of it and would inquire whether a proper study of this paradigm would be worthwhile. Thus, I intended to show one of the opinions which might arise at a first glance, that at one point the theory seems to take a turn for solipsism, and deal with it accordingly, by dismissing the doubts any possible reader might have.

During writing this article, several pieces of information and questions raised which I would consider worthy of future development: the paradox – whether it is truly necessary to postulate the Being as a EW and an It; the way, if any such are, one should employ Ockham's

Razor, since every living thing seems to have a corresponding EDW, fact which greatly increases the number of EDWs; and the status of the theoretical sciences – since we do not have a causal relation between our bodies and our minds, what could guarantee us there is an actual difference between a scientific article or book and any fictional creation, and what would this difference be?

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