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# PHILOSOPHIA

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## THE FUTURE OF ACCOUNTING'S PAST: A REFLECTION ON ITS CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

FRANÇOIS COETZEE<sup>1</sup>, PIETER BUYS<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** Contemporary corporate history demonstrates that, though accounting is acknowledged as the language of business, there are more and more cases where this language becomes an incomprehensible foreign language. The objective of accounting as promulgated by accounting regulators is characterized by large volumes of complex principles, which none but the most specialised accounting professionals can interpret. This very often results in many classes of accounting information users not being able to properly understand the message being conveyed. This paper aims to reflect on the primary objective of accounting by considering its historic evolution from its ancient roots as a record keeping function, through its bookkeeping phases up to when it actually began to resemble accounting as we know it in the contemporary business environment. Throughout this reflection, consideration is given to its intended purpose for the specific time period under consideration. The paper concludes that even though accounting has evolved much in its perceived objectives, the complexity of the contemporary business environment contributed to complex accounting principles and practices. Nonetheless, the key purpose of accounting should never be lost, that being that it is the language of business and as such it must be understandable to business stakeholders.

**Keywords:** *Accounting history, contemporary business, double entry accounting, bookkeeping, record keeping.*

### 1. BACKGROUND

#### 1.1. Introduction

Accounting history is not typically considered as a topic that would grab anybody's attention. For most business professionals, and perhaps even many accountants, the first reaction would probably be to frown upon the actual value of a reflection on the evolution of accounting. The immense value accounting has

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brought to the development of society is not often acknowledged or even realized. As non-grandeurs as the historic development of accounting may be, the impact accounting has had on the contemporary business environment is hard to deny. To this effect Buys (2011:17) states that accounting is more than just the *bookkeeping of business activities* or the *application of accounting standards*, but is rather to be seen as an important role-player in the global economy. As such accounting's influence extends into many spheres of human society.

Von Goethe (1795) expresses his high regard for the order accounting brings to the affairs of the business owner when he says it "is among the finest inventions of the human mind." The fact that accounting has established itself as a key element in the global business world is also reinforced by Munger (1994), then Vice-Chairman of Berkshire Hathaway Corporation (the famous Warren Buffett-company) when stating that it is "the language of practical business life" and that it "was a very useful thing to deliver to civilization". Buffet and Clark (2008) are of the opinion that any prudent business person has to "understand the nuances of accounting". Taking cognizance of these views, one can safely infer that the proper understanding and use of accounting in contemporary society should not be viewed as a *nice to have* business luxury, but rather as a *need to have* business necessity.

One might then ask how a reflection on accounting history may contribute to current accounting practices and theories. Huxley (1959) answers this question when he says that the (false) perception that people cannot learn from the lessons of the past is probably one of the more important lessons that history can teach. To this end Gomez (2008) warns that the evolution of accounting history should not be discarded as of *no relevance* to contemporary accounting practices, but the history of accounting should rather be used as a benchmark for the purpose and ultimate goal thereof. In support hereof Buys and Cronje (2013) state that early civilisations recognised the significance of resource management and wealth creation accountability, and that accounting played a key role in the recording and reporting of resource consumption.

The impact of accounting on the world of business is undeniable and not under scrutiny in this paper. However, whether accounting as a discipline has remained relevant and useful to contemporary business owners and managers, is a more significant topic of investigation. Schutte and Buys (2011) conducted research on Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) financial statements based on International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) as promulgated by the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB), measured against the use of such financial statements in their specific business environment. They found that the financial statements are not primarily used for business management purposes. They also found that many owner-managers

of businesses do not necessarily have the skills to interpret complex IFRS-based financial statements with any degree of usefulness to their daily business-decisions. In support hereof Baskerville and Cordery (2006) are of the opinion that accounting standards such as IFRS may be too complex and difficult for *general purpose users* to understand. The importance of this investigation is therefore encapsulated in the conundrum that if accounting is indeed the *language of business*, as referred to earlier, what happens to those business owners who cannot *speak the language*?

Building on the analogy that accounting is the *language* of business, one can refer to IFRS as the *dialect* all business owners are compelled to speak. A business dealing with banks, credit providers or investors that cannot *speak the language* may face unnecessary obstacles in its business activities and growth potential. Yamey (1994) holds the view that the basic principles of double entry bookkeeping has stayed intact and virtually unchanged for more than 500 years. This implies that the business world has regarded accounting as useful enough for it to be around for 500 years. However, at the same time a shadow has been cast on how relevant complex accounting standards have made accounting to the modern business owner.

## 2. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGY

In consideration of the aforementioned, reflecting on the *when*, the *where*, the *why* and by *whom* of accounting may seem rather superfluous and irrelevant. The answer however, possibly lies in a more existentialistic approach to the accounting phenomenon. This paper intends to reflect on the historically intended purpose of accounting in pondering the question of how relevant accounting has remained as a business tool in the contemporary business environment. To find possible answers to this question one would need to start by placing the evolution of the accounting phenomena, and the value it has already imparted, into perspective.

In justification of this paper's research methodology, Probert (1999) is of the belief that the critical (meta-science) framework may successfully be exploited in the research of interlacing disciplines, in this instance focussing on accountancy and history. In the context of this paper, a critically interpretive reflection will attempt to evaluate some of accounting's pre-suppositions. There is thus less concern with the factual contemporary accountancy aspects, but rather with the historical level of aspects in the evolution of accountancy from its infancy to its current status. By plotting the occurrences through the annals of history of business *needs development* we can establish a possible timeline of necessities that were the root driving forces in the evolution of accounting, and then not only to consider the *when* and *where* of accounting history, but also the *why* and by *whom*.



### 3. THE EVOLUTION OF ACCOUNTING

#### 3.1. Introduction

Edwards (1960) emphasises that the development and evolution of accounting started with the necessity to satisfy a specific need that was present at a certain time in a certain place. The bartering of property between parties, for example, necessitated the recording of such property exchanges for purposes of legal and historic reference. Various authors have come to the conclusion that accounting, in one form or another is as old as civilization itself with several archaeological findings supporting this premise (Goldberg, 1974; Hopwood and Johnson, 1986; Hopwood, 1987). Parker (1977) and Funnell (1996) go as far as to say that primitive trade routes dating as far back as 9500BC suggest that merchandising and trading may even have existed before civilisation as we perceive it today. Sylph (2007) mentions that some of the earliest written records found in Egypt and Mesopotamia dating back as early as 2000 to 3300 BC, indicate tax recordings. Some accounting historians believe that *accountants* may even have invented writing (Parker, 1977).

When delving into the historic past one must bear in mind that any reference to *bookkeeping* or *accounting* in these records is not a direct implication of accounting systems and methodologies as we know it today, but rather as fleeting as a reference to stock piling of food reserves and the like.

For the purpose of this paper we will take a look at some of the earliest occurrences of accounting principles and the emergence of the double entry accounting system, in order to reflect on the driving forces behind the development of double entry accounting. According to Thompson (2003) one should view early accounting as the keeping of records to establish the rights and obligations of participants to a transaction. Edwards (1960) classifies the development of accounting into sequential phases as follows:

- Record keeping: The preserving of documents as evidence of a business transaction.
- Bookkeeping: The analysis, classification and recording of business transactions, as the basis for financial reporting.
- Accounting: Bookkeeping with additional summaries and control functions.

We will reflect on the development of accountancy based on these broad phases of development.

### 3.2. Record Keeping

Going back to the dawn of civilization makes tracking a specific phenomenon difficult. People of ancient times were for all intent and purposes illiterate in relation to contemporary society, thus making historical proof difficult to find, identify and even interpret. This being said, there are still instances where evidence of transactional recordings have been found (Goldberg, 1974; Hopwood and Johnson, 1986; Hopwood, 1987). It would seem that ancient societies faced similar problems as contemporary society as far as recordkeeping, control and verification are concerned.

Based on the evidence gained of ancient Babylon indicating the recording of commercial transactions as well as dealings of government and temples, Edwards (1960) deduces that record keeping was most likely mainly used by i) political leaders and government officials primarily for taxation purposes; and ii) the wealthy who needed to know that they could trust their slaves and subordinates.

This necessitated varying versions of transactional recording and auditing. Alexander (2002) highlights the fact that this was a more complex task than one would imagine as an effective accounting system was not yet available, writing was mastered by few, writing materials were expensive and financial systems were non-existent.

One can safely assume that *record keeping* principles didn't have a single point of creation, but was rather a solution for a specific need existing within a specific society at a specific point in time. Although the exact origins of record keeping are unknown, some of the earliest known records of commerce can be traced back to the Babylonian and Assyrian empires between 4000 and 5000 years before the appearance of double entry accounting (Alexander, 2002). The famous Code of Hammurabi, King of the First Dynasty of Babylon, was produced during this time, estimated at around 2285 to 2242 BC (Edwards, 1960; Salisu, 2014). It contains many references to the rules of conducting business. Harsh penalties and punishments were prescribed for parties who did not adhere to these business codes which Alexander (2002) believes necessitated the keeping of accurate records in order to prevent disputes.

As much as the Code of Hammurabi is regarded as the earliest proof of a transactional recording system, it is not the *only* early proof of such a system there is. In the ancient ruins of the City of Jericho, an ancient accounting system was found providing evidence of a priest keeping records of the livestock (Mattessich: 1989). Furthermore, archaeologists found written tax records on clay tablets in the Egyptian tomb of King Scorpion I, dating as far back as 3000BC (Johnson and Kaplan, 1987). Thompson (2003) refers to papyrus records dating back to the period 1552 to 1080 BC, providing lists of offerings made to the gods, entombed with the Pharaoh.

Although Egypt was a developed civilisation with the advantage of papyrus availability, Alexander (2002) believes that their accounting abilities never progressed further than an ability to make lists, in which the content of stockpiles and storehouses were meticulously recorded. Alexander (2002) believes that the lack of an accurate monetary measuring unit doomed the Egyptian empire's accounting systems to no more than *list making and verification*.

The ancient Roman Empire, owes its accounting contribution to individual households, which were required to submit regular reports on their receipts and expenditures and overall financial position for tax purposes. The Empire eventually also had its own budget in which it managed its taxes, revenues and expenditures (Alexander, 2002). Evidence indicates that Roman record keeping reached a higher degree of accuracy than either that of the Babylonian or Egyptian civilizations, and as such they were noted for their administrative abilities (Edwards, 1960).

In the Far East, China used accounting mainly as an evaluation system to test the efficiency of governmental programs and the civil servants who administered such programs (Alexander, 2002). The Chinese accounting system only showed some progression during the Chao Dynasty of 1122 to 256 BC, but remained quite stagnant in terms of development until the advent of double entry accounting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Alexander, 2002; Thompson, 2003; ten Have, 1976).

The Athens of 600 to 500BC was centred around state controlled temples and the average Greek had little use for accounting knowledge other than knowing whom he owed or who owed him something (ten Have, 1976; Thompson, 2003). Nonetheless, the Greek civilization made a valuable contribution to accountancy by introducing coined money (Alexander, 2002). For the double entry system to be able to work efficiently a uniformly recognized valuation method was necessary, it needed a *token* that had a standardised value and was applicable to any transaction. Alexander (2002) is of the opinion that the ancient Greek banking systems were more advanced than in other societies of that era. Bankers kept record books of accounts, loaned out money, and even transferred cash from one bank to another for their clients.

Based on the above it is seen that during these ancient periods the need for record keeping was driven by political, religious and military powers. Thus, the need for control over resources of various kinds necessitated the development of record keeping. Part of our initial research problem statement was to identify the *why* accounting was used and by *whom* it was used. The former has been established, i.e. to keep track of resources. The latter has also been established, i.e. by political, religious and military powers. We need, however, to try and equate the record keeping of ancient times with the modern business environment if we are to extract

any value from the lessons taught by history. As such it may be argued that it is reasonable to suggest that the political, religious and military powers of ancient times can be compared to the modern business owner. Assets and resources were being managed by subordinates for the exclusive right of use and ownership of these powers. The businessmen, including those in a SME context, of our time conducts their business in the same manner, i.e. assets and resources are managed by subordinates, or by themselves, for the exclusive right of use by the owner of the business. It is therefore argued that accounting's initial steps in history were thus taken for the purpose of self-enrichment and wealth creation.

### **3.3. Bookkeeping**

During the Medieval period, bookkeeping was localized under the feudal system and its structured societies (Alexander, 2002). Whittow (2010) is of the opinion that economic growth in Europe was initiated by the existence of free peasantry. Peasant farmers were starting to contribute largely to the resources of their surrounding areas which triggered the move towards a feudal system, which can be seen an economic, political and social system all wrapped up in one, in which land was provided by the *government* in return for services to be rendered. These services could be in the form of protection of the realm, working of the lands or the like. It also necessitated keeping track of services rendered in lieu of the lands held. The system required was one of calculating earnings and the accompanying taxes to be levied on such earnings. Bookkeepers were expected to not only keep record of the revenues but also the expenses.

According to Alexander (2002) when William the Conqueror invaded England in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, he took possession of all properties on behalf of the King, and he surveyed all real estate in order to calculate the taxes due. The record of this survey and tax calculation is known as the Domesday Book. The oldest known accounting record in the English language is the Pipe Roll, also referred to as the Great Roll of the Exchequer, which encapsulates a description of all rents, fines and taxes. Although one might argue that this process can be likened to nothing more than the keeping of records, there is a distinction. In this era of development the underlying earnings and expenses needed to be calculated first to establish a basis for the calculation of taxes due. One can then also assume that a form of verification may have been required to prove the amounts earned or spent.

Towards the end of the medieval period manufacturing started to become specialised and dynamic changes occurred in trade and commerce under the guild system, necessitating the creation of a more formalised and accurate bookkeeping

system (Edwards, 1960). Alexander (2002) is of the opinion that Italy, during the Renaissance (14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century), is widely regarded as the place where modern accounting developed. Italy became a leading commercial nation and was looking for better ways of calculating their profits. Italian commerce started to use *capital* and *credit* on an increasing scale, which necessitated a reliable system that could serve as a system of record keeping and bookkeeping.

The transition from *single* entry to *double* entry bookkeeping can clearly be seen in the records of the Datini Company of Prato. During the period 4<sup>th</sup> February 1383 to 31<sup>st</sup> January 1399 documented transitions were found that show the move towards a double entry accounting system. These documents show the move from an old register, where recording took place in paragraphs, to a new, double-side register, including as many as 600 auxiliary sub-books (Arlinghaus, 2004). Thus the birth of the double entry system of accounting as we know it today was at hand and the rules of transactional recording for commerce and trade were about to change forever.

Again we need to equate the bookkeeping of the medieval times with the modern business environment. In the medieval economy the hierarchy of the economic activity would be from the landlord, as owner of the land and economic activities, to the King, as beneficial recipient of income due to his position. Although the king had no direct interest in the activities of the landlord, he was entitled to a portion of the profits generated. In modern terms one can see the peasant farmers as employees of a business owner. The landlord as the business owner who is driven to make profits for his own, direct benefit, and for the indirect benefit of the king. As was the case in record keeping, bookkeeping is also founded on business needs in which transactional records are the proof of economic prowess. Accounting's next step in history is thus a move away from direct application for the business owner only. Reporting is now required not only for the landlord's benefit, but for the benefit of a third party, the king, as well.

### **3.4. Accounting**

With international trade expanding and trade routes to the east becoming more popular during the time of the Crusades, it is very likely that the evolution of double entry accounting was due to various influences, from various cultures, becoming intertwined (Lauwers, 1994). The transition from a *bookkeeping* system to an *accounting* system occurred when *a set of books* was no longer just a repository for notes to be referred to when settling accounts (Edwards, 1960). The very first use of a complete double entry bookkeeping system was the Farolfi ledger of 1299 to 1300 (Gurskaya et al, 2012). The ledger contained debits and credits

and accompanying journals. A few years later the art of accounting had expanded and we find the first complete set of double entry accounting books. The books of account of Soranzo and Brothers of Genoa in 1340 not only make use of debits and credits and journal entries, but also use profit and loss and capital accounts (Edwards, 1960). According to Edwards (1960) and Lauwers (1994) the ledgers were being closed off, profits calculated and balances carried forward on a yearly basis. As commerce moved into a more capital intensive era, investments in business ventures became more prevalent.

This is seen in large corporations like the British East India Company of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. A decision was made by the company to pay profits to their investors, and not a return on capital invested (Edwards, 1960). This created the problem of distinguishing between capital and income. More advanced and accurate accounting methods were required and demanded. And so, the era of bookkeeping had evolved into the era of the accounting.

Thompson (2003) believes a social desire for legitimacy of merchants and their trading reputations contributed largely to the requirement for a reliable accounting system. A major step towards double entry accounting was the introduction of Arabic numerals. Alexander (2002) deduces that there were 7 main factors that contributed to Italy being more predisposed to the development of the double entry bookkeeping system, namely:

- Private property: Italy's commercial setup allowed the transfer of private property, which required the ability to track such changes.
- Commercial trading: Large volumes of trading with multiple clients necessitated a system that could adequately deal with the high transactional volumes.
- Writing: Proper accounting documentation and recording required a high level of writing skills to be able to record various transactions and their values.
- Mathematical competency: The Arabic numerical system allowed for the means to effectively calculate and record the relative values of transactions.
- Money: Currency filled the need for a common denominator of value between parties when negotiating a particular trade.
- Availability of credit: As the use of credit transaction started to become more common, the need to keep track of these debts became imperative.
- Capital employment: The ability to keep track of transactions while keeping capital transactions separate, became of vital importance as merchants started trading by using agents and partnerships.

Although all these factors existed at various times and various places across the globe, they were never all present at the same time in the same place, in such a manner that the double entry accounting system would be the result (Alexander, 2002; Johnson and Kaplan, 1987).

At the forefront of the evolution of accounting as we know it today, are two names of significant historic value, namely Benedetto Cotruguli and Luca Pacioli. Although historically Luca Pacioli is often credited as *being the father* of double entry accounting, it was Benedetto Cotruguli who was the first person to write about the double entry accounting system. In 1458 Benedetto Cotruguli wrote *Delia Mercatura et del Mercante Perfetto* (Of Trading and the Perfect Trader). Although his work was not published until 1573, it is the oldest known manuscript on double entry accounting (ten Have, 1976). Frater Luca Pacioli, on the other hand, published his book *Summa de Arithmetica, Geometria, Proportioni et Proportionalita* (roughly translated as *Everything About Arithmetic, Geometry and Proportion*) in 1494 (Alexander, 2002). This is the first known version of a printed reference to double entry accounting and is regarded by many as the basis of modern accounting (Fogo, 1905; McCarthy et al, 2008). Pacioli was however familiar with the work of Benedetto Cotruguli and credited him with the origination of the double entry system (Alexander, 2002). It is interesting to note that Pacioli's book, which primarily dealt with mathematics and included chapters on bookkeeping, was not written as a book explaining *new* ideas, but rather as a book explaining and elaborating on *existing* ideas. Warsono-bin-Hardono (2013) takes this to be an indication that double entry bookkeeping, in some form or another, had been in common use by the time Pacioli wrote his treatise. More importantly in the context of this paper, Pacioli presents practical *business* rules and does not explain the philosophy behind the system. One can assume that Pacioli must have felt that only the rules needed to be elaborated on.

Sangster (2010) is of the opinion that the double entry accounting system was necessitated by the fact that Italy's commerce had developed into a system where business people started using agents and partnerships to trade with. Tracking performance and profits had become an exercise of utmost importance and a reliable method of record keeping was needed. Through the publication of Pacioli's treatise on 10 November 1494 by Gutenberg, a unified double entry version of accounting was created (Sangster, 2010; Alexander, 2002). The spread of Piccioli's work ensured that by 1800, the Venetian way of double entry bookkeeping was the standard across Europe (Gleeson-White, 2012).

Again we need to equate the accounting of this era with the modern business environment. Of great importance to the accounting of this era is that the main focus of accounting had significantly moved towards third party reporting. Investors

and shareholders were direct stakeholders in the profits of business. Where the king in medieval times had a detached interest in the profits of business, the shareholders had a direct, vested interest in the performance of business. This is directly comparable to the modern business environment. The contemporary business is often also exposed to situations of multiple shareholders. Furthermore, most businesses are also reliant on third party financing in some way or another.

Accounting's final step is thus a move even further away from managerial use by business owners. Accounting has evolved into a tool with which to create transparency for direct stakeholders (shareholders) and indirect stakeholders (investors and financiers).

#### **4. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA OF ACCOUNTING**

According to Lauwers (1994) the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism were driving factors in the development of accounting theory in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. With large amounts of capital being needed as investment in large business ventures, private ownership changed to a legal framework where ownership was separated from the operations of the business. With greater investments however, came a greater need for accountability. This ultimately led to the more stringent accounting and business disclosure regulations and a growing need for independent attestation of external accounts by auditors. Commenting on the direction in which accounting has developed; Chambers (1999) is of the opinion that with the advent of complex accounting standards, accounting frameworks and the so-called Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (or GAAP), that "accountants have insulated themselves from the world of affairs by a cocoon of their own making". The concern is that although such accounting frameworks and complex accounting standards are only empirical observations based on perceived business practices, it does in effect govern not only the development of accounting theory and accounting research, but also accounting dogma. One needs to ask whether contemporary accounting, as a discipline born out of necessity with a demand for practicality, may have been theorized into impracticality.

The intention of this review was to explore the annals of accounting history to reveal not only the *when* and *where* of accounting evolution, but also the *who* and the *why* of accounting's development. What has become clear is that the initial development of accountancy was based on a needs analysis by the users of accounting information. The later stages of development became more complicated as reporting to third parties became more prevalent. We therefore argue that the purpose of accounting was to provide reliable knowledge, and that this knowledge has to be reliable to all users. Currently, the level of reliability may depend on the user's understanding of the complex intricacies of the underlying accounting standards. The original purpose of



accounting was to assist the business owner; the current use however has evolved into more of a third party reporting mechanism. As stated, the initial research objective was to reflect on whether accountancy has lost its relevance as far as its usefulness to business owners is concerned. Business owners, and perhaps specifically in the context of SMEs, may feel that the complex accounting theory involved in current accounting practice has little to no use to them in their day to day commercial dealings.

In contemplation of the historical and orderly objective of accounting to offer useable information to all stakeholders, a too constricted emphasis of accounting can be condemned. In the contemporary business environment, accounting's function is becoming less a singular business language, and more a corporate information depository. Stakeholders cannot escape the fact that despite their views on the usefulness of accounting practice and information, it may be a necessary evil they need to bare. Whether they are applying for finance, submitting tax returns, attracting investments or merely carrying on their daily trade, they will not be able to escape the need for robust accounting systems. One should not make the mistake of judging the usefulness of accounting by its complexity. Just because something is complex does not mean it is not useful. Its usefulness can be found in what it helps the business owner achieve.

What has our journey through the evolution of accounting then been in aid of in the context of the contemporary business environment? We have learnt that although accounting may never lose its business relevance, its intended purpose may have changed to a more or lesser extent. Accounting has evolved beyond the point of specific usefulness to the owner, to a point of intended usefulness to (certain) external third parties. Without entering into a discussion on the necessity or not of a set of complex accounting standards, one cannot help but consider whether the new era of accounting may have strayed from the historic pathway envisaged by Luca Pacioli when double entry accounting was presented to the world. Be that as it may, double entry accounting has proven to be an exceptionally resilient and dynamic discipline.

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## ARGUMENTS FOR A KIERKEGAARDIAN REREADING OF POSTMODERNITY AT THE LEVEL OF A KEY-(ARCHI)TECTONIC SHIFT: THE KAIROS<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT.** The present study attempts to legitimize a re-reading of postmodernity's utter confusions and con-fusions (modern man's loss of the sense of the Self, his weird panic attacks, his dissipations, his loss of personal and collective magnetisms [of faith], his parapsychological and crypto-phenomenological impels to disengage from his objective boundaries) at the level of that special type of vortical dynamics induced by Kierkegaard's notion of leap (kairos). The accumulated pain coming towards us from the tension of the eternal human incompleteness (constant para-archi-tectonic inconsistency, impossibility to complete cycles, ontological instability and resistance to total representations) of paradoxes proves itself to be the very "fuel" necessary in the enactment of the leap (of the kairos) from one existential level to another. In essence, it is a chaos-filled transition towards the origin of chaos and of creation, towards the uncreated as generous-potency-to-be-apprehended and internalized by the stellar desirer and by the stellar seducer. Every kairos is a personal (and heavily personalized) spiritual exercise for re-enacting the primal movement of the uncreated towards the fragile intricacies of creation. It is an enthroned heterogeneity with its crown made of the fertile plasma of all boiling homogeneities.

**Keywords:** *Kairos, the uncreated as generous-potency, Kierkegaardian re-reading of postmodernity, paradox, vortex, chaos*

The paradox within which the Danish dialectician Søren Kierkegaard conceived the issue of anxiety (*sympathetic antipathy* and *antipathetic sympathy*), in the earliest days of modernity, advanced at the time a vision that we could call today (in the light of Zygmunt Bauman's and Jean Baudrillard's theories) *a fluid or a liquid structural*

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*night-vision of a reality ruled by anticoagulant instabilities* (growing disturbances which prevent entities and configurations from reaching their coherence, cohesiveness and chiasm) and “protoplasmatically” *traversed by steepish and ironish opposite tension currents* that bore, hole and invaginate their deep, slow and hard (nerve-pressing) whirlpools all across the psychosphere.

In other words, in Kierkegaard’s work as in Postmodernity, there is no chiasm and no synthesis between the authentic and the inauthentic, only a demented tension between the two, a tension which summons all of man’s energies in order to prepare a leap (a *kairos*) from one existential level (stage) to another (Kierkegaard speaks of three such stages: ethical, esthetical and religious). *The anxiety is anxiety experienced in front of the void / vacuum (with its whirlpools, vortexes, maelstroms and vertigos) that we have to overcome by “jumping” (from one existential level to another), but it is also the tensioning element that (by the medium of the strong contractions of despair and of the panic attacks) prepares our springs for this big “anti-gravitational” displacement (because we in fact “jump” over our own inner nothingness).* In this regard we offer two passages from Mădălina Diaconu’s book – *Pe Marginea Abisului, Søren Kierkegaard și nihilismul secolului al XIX (On the Edge of the Precipice, Søren Kierkegaard and the Nihilism of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century)* – that perfectly synthesize the entire issue at stake in here:

1. “(...) Kierkegaard mentions the fact that man represents a synthesis between body and soul, synthesis in which the element of mediation is represented by the spirit, and that before the Fall [*author’s note*: before fallibility] the spirit was absent, its place being occupied by the dread-generating Nothingness. The commentators are unanimous in interpreting human anguish as actual dread experienced in front of the nothingness of one’s own liberty, in front of one’s own possibilities of action, unknown to the individual himself. It is not simply a ‘response to the unknown, to what is not identified’ (Rotenstreich, 446<sup>3</sup>), because, as shown by Hans Rochol, anxiety is not the dread of the exterior, objective nothingness, but the dread of the *not-yet nothingness*, of the nothingness of one’s own spirit that is just about to be placed [*author’s note*: enacted]. The Nothingness which generates anxiety is not absolute, but only temporary, ‘a simple *not-yet nothingness*’ (*ein blosses noch Nichts*) (...) (Rochol, XXXII<sup>4</sup>). It is still a ‘*for the time being* [*author’s note*: up to now] *absolute nothingness*’ (**noch gar Nichts**), since the future self involves a radical act of creation [*author’s note*: a “jump”], the subject

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<sup>3</sup> Mădălina Diaconu’s reference: Rotenstreich, Nathan, *Love and Leap. Nietzsche’s and Kierkegaard’s Approaches to Philosophy*. In “Kant-Studien”, 74 (1983), Heft 4.

<sup>4</sup> Mădălina Diaconu’s reference: Rochol, Hans – In: Søren Kierkegaard – *Der Begriff Angst*. Übersetzt, mit Einleitung und Kommentarhrg. Von Hans Rochol, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 1984.

not being determined or conditioned by something present; between the state of paradisiacal innocence and that which follows after the committing of the first sin we have no continuity, but only a leap that our thinking can only approximate with the help of psychology, and it will do so without being able to understand it or to find a sufficient reason for it. The nothingness of the primeval, Adamic anxiety, is a 'noch *gar* (s.n.) Nichts', because freedom will establish the self from [*author's note*: out of] nothing<sup>5</sup>, freedom being devoid [*author's note*: free] of cause. The same interpretation is to be found at Stack as well, in the definition given to anguish as 'dizziness that can be felt by someone in front of the sheer, precipitous possibility.' (Stack, 1977, p. 155)."(Diaconu, 1996, pp. 120-121, our translation)

2. "Anxiety represents an ambiguous phenomenon par excellence, difficult to assess in terms of the existential imperative. (...) *It precedes the fall into the original sin and any new sin committed by man, but, at the same time, it also prepares the leap into faith* [*author's note*: our italics] (...). It can be said about the anxiety that it is contaminated by the condition of the interval in which the human existence unfolds, with its face turned simultaneously towards sin and towards faith. (...)." (Diaconu, 1996, p. 123, our translation)

And the "state of affairs" where there is *no chiasm and no synthesis between the authentic and the inauthentic and where one is forced to literally "jump" over his disarticulations* is basically post-modernity's condition à la lettre (for further insights into this type of ontological danger [i.e. that of not being able to perform the "jump", the "leap"], please see Emil Cioran's essay on "the disarticulation of time" and on the "falling out of history and out of time") – hence the precise relevance of a Kierkegaardian reading of our contemporaneity (a period marked by a liberty devoid of cause and of ontological support and by a suspension in hesitation [indecisiveness] and in the nothingness of an eternal middle ["middle" used also with the sense of "insufficient"] position<sup>6</sup>):

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<sup>5</sup> Mădălina Diaconu's footnote: "The fact of becoming a self is, according to Rochol, 'a self-creation out of nothing'." (*eine Selbst-Schöpfung aus dem Nichts – ibidem, XXIII*)."

<sup>6</sup> "*author's note*: Anxiety] places the individual 'in the nothingness of the middle position' (*im Nichts der Mitte*), therefore in a suspended existence, (...) or, as the spirit in Kierkegaard's writings is essentially activity, becoming with the help of choice and of decision, the stiffness [*author's note*: the rooting] in indecision cannot mean anything other than missing the possibility of becoming a self. Anxiety represents an ambiguous phenomenon par excellence, difficult to assess in terms of the existential imperative. (...) *It precedes the fall into the original sin and any new sin committed by man, but, at the same time, it also prepares the leap into faith* [*author's note*: our italics] (...). It can be said about the anxiety that it is contaminated by the condition of the interval in which the human existence unfolds, with its face turned simultaneously towards sin and towards faith. (...)." (Diaconu, 1996, p. 123, our translation)

“Modernity is best characterized not as an already established ‘structure’, nor as something which clearly has the capacity to become structured and coherent, but rather as a fruitless attempt to achieve structure and coherence. Everything leads us to the conclusion that structures are being ‘destructured’ even before they have gained a coherent internal stability. They are then integrated within new systems which themselves are already threatened by contradictions and negativity. Everything leads us to the conclusion that it is impossible to represent the ‘world’ as having a realizable structure and a possible stability.” (Lefebvre, 1995, pp. 187-188)

In post-modernity, this structure-disabling, structure-subverting and structure-disempowering tension meant to define *the indefinable (the ineffable) or the edge between the inner and the outer darkness*, through the personalized magnetisms of faith (“foi”)<sup>7</sup>, reinforces the vacuous but also highlights better the reasons feeding the deadly-paralyses of despair: the fear of losing one’s faith (“foi” or intuition of the ineffable) and of remaining a prisoner of the immediate (of the infamous / notorious “croyance”).

*Postmodernity is a historical period whose dreaded “crusade” and quest is that of trying to re-discover, re-establish and re-live its lost faith – hence its catastrophic disarticulations.* Paul Ricoeur, following Kierkegaard’s “trail”, highlights the poison that substantiates the ground between secularization and utopia’s ideologies (the fatal side of the Hegelian legacy), while reinforcing the idea that personal faith alone can redeem an individual from his acts of succumbing to moral and spiritual degradation, and that any attempt to transcribe it in other registers of social action or of social thinking demagnetizes (spoils) its force of coagulation or, even worse, invests it with a fatally-misinterpreted attraction towards destruction and termination:

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<sup>7</sup> In what concerns the Kierkegaardian (af)filiation of this idea and mystical credo, one should not overlook the strange irony that gave birth to its decisive existentially-personalist twist in the first place: “In effect, Kierkegaard takes seriously the ironic taunt of David Hume who, after demolishing all rational grounds for a belief in miracles, remarks that anyone who still has faith ‘is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience’ (David West’s citation: Hume, David: *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, [1777]. ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902, p. 131.) In purpose, Kierkegaard seeks to found religious belief on the subjective truth of personal experience. His claim is that, through faith, a truth can be approached which is far more important for our lives than either the theoretical truths of science or the speculative system of philosophy.” (West in Goodin ad Pettit, 1995, p. 52)

“Does the man really live in a secularized world, or merely survive? The profanity – can it really exist without profanation (desecration)? Does the political transcription of the absolute still maintain the function of deliverance of the latter? Asking these questions is not only breaking away from a deadly oscillation, but it is re-finding (recovering) the reasons why faith escapes the alternative of ideology and of utopia, while ruining what Hegel called the 'causality of destiny'” (Ricoeur in Castelli, 1976, p. 60, our translation)

And, to even better justify our decision to re-read postmodernity through Kierkegaard, (besides the previous appeal to Ricoeur) we can't forget to mention that Jean-Paul Sartre's lifelong partner, Simone de Beauvoir, can be said to have acquired the communicable substring of her body of work only by further drawing on Kierkegaard's distinction between objective and subjective truth in the general equation of Christianity – a distinction mentioned in the section entitled “Concluding Unscientific Postscript” of his *Philosophical Fragments*, where he states that *how* one believes, his luring devotion and the sincerest depth of his compelling passion are much more important when it comes to summoning a transcendental force than *what* one believes in, than his manic but obtuse (lacking sensitivity and quickness of perception) and desolate chase of a harmonious relationship with “the right object”, or of a flawless correspondence with “an independent reality”. *To betray the spirit of the historical game* is to be tyrannically-dishonest and to incline the otherwise unavoidable dialectical (intertwined) relationship between the subjective free-will and its historical context in favour of the latter, thus submitting to the overpowering force or yielding to the overwhelming pressure and to the fatally-endemic colour of the accumulated detritus and cinder of history (according to Kierkegaard, honesty and the intensity of dedication, in their relationship to history, but mostly to a truly a-historical hot nucleus, can only come from one's courageous direct relationship with anxiety [which is, has always been and will always be the truest and the fiercest untreatable and unstopable principle of human evolution and perdition]):

“(…) it is no doubt impossible to approach any human problem without partiality: even the way of asking questions, of adopting perspectives, presupposes hierarchies of interests; all characteristics comprise values, every so-called objective description is set against an ethical background. Instead of trying to conceal those principles that are more or less explicitly implied, we would be better off stating them from the start.” (Beauvoir, 2009, p. 16)

In Kierkegaard's perfectly- / ultimately-synthesized terms, these situations translate the fear of losing contact with totality (with one's fabulous hot centre of coagulation and magnetic endurance), and of being reduced to circumstances, that is,



to “the particular thing in the particular instance” (i.e. of being dissipated, confused and in full process of disintegration because deprived of a gravitational centre [of a testifiable inner ground]):

“The least inconsistency is a prodigious loss, for with that a man in fact loses consistency; that same instant the charm is perhaps broken, the mysterious power which bound all powers in harmony is enfeebled, the spring loses its tension, the whole machinery is a chaos where the forces fight in rebellion against one another, to the injury of the self, and therein there is no accord with oneself, no momentum, no impetus. The prodigious machine which in consistency was so compliant with its iron strength, so pliable with all its power, is in disorder; and the more excellent the machine was, all the more frightful is the confusion. – The believer, who reposes in and has his strength in the consistency of the good, has an infinite fear of even the least sin, for he stands to lose infinitely. The immediate men – the childlike or the childish – have no totality to lose, they constantly lose and win only the particular thing and in the particular instance.” (Kierkegaard, 2013, pp. 427-428)

*As stated previously, the accumulated pain coming towards us from the tension of this incompleteness (constant inconsistency) proves itself to be the very “fuel” necessary in the enactment of the leap (of the kairos) from one existential level to another. In essence, it is a chaos-filled transition towards the origin of chaos and of creation, towards the uncreated as generous-potency-to-be-apprehended and internalized by the stellar desirer and by the stellar seducer. Every kairos is a personal (and heavily personalized) spiritual exercise for re-enacting the primal movement of the uncreated towards the fragile intricacies of creation. It is an enthroned heterogeneity with its crown made of the fertile plasma of all boiling homogeneities.*

What Kierkegaard does when engaging the method of kairos is to *bring back to the table and to re-establish existentially and pre-phenomenologically* Plato’s vision on transition from the dialogue Parmenides, an ancient work which is also the building-block for Heidegger’s later phenomenological valorization of the notion of kairos under a new denomination, that of the *Augenblick* (the moment of vision, of transforming novelty, of revelation). In this regard, Koral Ward interprets the notion of “kairos” as “fitting time for action”, as decisive turn / step, as action of revealing (what Heidegger would call later the essential opening within the Dasein), as restoration of the self on its authentic (healthiest) coordinates, and as emerging redemptive novelty:

“The Greek concept of kairos or the fitting time for action underpins the Augenblick, it denotes a decisive, critical point dependent on one who has the skill and wherewithal to act.” (Ward, 2012, p. xii)

“NU is ‘one of the two most common words for «new» since the classical period’; the other, *kairos*, whose derivation is uncertain, means ‘new’ in the sense of ‘what is new and distinctive’ in relation to other existing things.” (Ward, 2012, p. 8)

“ ‘happiness’ has its roots in the Old English ‘happen’ meaning ‘a stroke of fortune’ or ‘an opportune time’ and this allows us to make a connection with the Greek concept of *kairos*, as an event which comes at the appropriate time. Hence we can think of the ‘happening’ of this historical event as such a stroke of fortune for human being that has an effect felt into eternity.” (Ward, 2012, p. 12)

Yet it is the French exegesis that, in the logic sought by us in here, gave the decisive necessary twist to the notion, by relating the entire discussion around the phenomenon of *kairos* to “the rhetor’s ambition to both find and be challenged by truth (...); to become a *transformative professional*<sup>8</sup> (...)” (Couture, 1998, p. 132) capable to truly communicate his critical identity (i.e. to make the necessary transition [“leap of faith”] from Cronus [the god of the “normal” time] to Kairos [the god of “the right time”<sup>9</sup>, of the befitting time or, in corporatist postmodern “slang”, of “the timely opportunity to leverage convergence trends”]). *It is precisely here that the mouth of the vortex incarnates itself in the mouth and in the voice of the Death-Theorist (Kierkegaard’s truest “professional” label):*

“*Kairos*, which is translated into Latin by *opportunitas*, in French by *chance*, reveals the nature of things: the state such as the feelings of a crowd, the health of a patient; but it also points to a know-how: the knowledge that a rhetorician has of the time when one could swing an audience, and the knowledge that a doctor has of the moment when he must give the drug in order to reverse the situation. It is still a time, but one which is out of the duration; it is the fugitive but essential moment, subjected to hazard but linked to the absolute. (...) *Kairos* makes us think about the string of events happening in the world, about hazard, about the unpredictable course of things, but it also sends back to a previous knowledge. *Kairos* is nothing without the knowledge that allows us to recognize it; it is but an event among others for the one who does not know. But, for the one who knows, it is what reveals to him his own knowledge, by the shock of reality which reveals itself as significant.” (Pigeaud in Guillermit, 2001, pp. 18-19, our translation)

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<sup>8</sup> One of Postmodernity’s professional obsessions.

<sup>9</sup> “If there is only one way to do things the right way, there are many manners to miss them. (...) One of them consists in making too early or too late what should have been done later or earlier. The Greeks have a name for distinguishing this coincidence of the human action and time, which makes it so that the time is right and the action is good: this is the *Kairos*, the favourable occasion, the opportune time.” (Aubenque, 1976, pp. 96-97, our translation).

This is also the “realest” meaning of the technical action derived from divine intervention – an impetuous instance denoting the moment when the mouth of the vortex acquires a human expressiveness and *enacts a complete transmogrification* (the highest possible answer to a divine elicitation *understood*, in the context of our present essay, *as ascending dark inner sap*<sup>10</sup> *into the light of creation*<sup>11</sup>, *through a decreation* (Simone Weil’s term<sup>12</sup>) *followed by a re-creation which has adjudicated [ab-sorbed] the strength of the vortex*):

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<sup>10</sup> Direct reference to Nick Land’s dark fluidity which, according to the author, exists at the roots of our nature and evilly, archaically and primordially rebels against (and undermines) the security of *terra firma*. “Nick Land writes: ‘A dark fluidity at the roots of our nature rebels against the security of *terra firma*.’ (Land, 1990, p. 107) Land goes on to note how reason acts as a salve against the fluidity of nature. The chapter where Land has this discussion is entitled ‘Fanged noumenon’, and, as the title implies, Land argues that noumena cannot be an epistemological limit but rather are an ontological fact. In other words, noumena are fanged because they do not remain harmlessly domesticated in the cage of Kantian categorization, but rather, damage and determine us and our thinking by their very nature.” (Woodard, 2013, p. 31) *In other words, the breaking and the fraying of the identity in modernity re-installs the vortical at all ontological, aesthetic and phenomenal levels* “(...)not only (...) as an indeterminate object but as the edge of a disastrous object (...); vortexes that in themselves are objects with a minimal boundary (...)” (Woodard, 2013, p. 33) – the science-fiction, the diabolically and violently-fractal and edgy forms of modern painting, the outburst of neo-nihilist lamenting theorizations (which reached their peak with Baudrillard) and other forms of extreme art, being but testimonies (symptomatic reverberations) in this regard, and also unforgiving and blood-thirsty redemptive nails in the coffin of Kantianism.

<sup>11</sup> In a commentary on Pindar, Romeyer-Dherbey perfectly highlights this capacity of *kairos* to generate (or to unleash) an outburst of transformative divinizing light, one capable to absorb the darkest, the cloggiest, the most demonically viscous and the thickest fluidities into its infernal aureole: “The sudden eruption of *kairos*, that is to say of a time visited by the god, is generally marked in Pindar’s writings, by the appearance of light. (...) When the storm has consistently darkened the earth, suddenly the wind drops, the rain stops, the clouds are half-open - and this is the upturn, a light-glade suddenly, in a place of desolation. The man felt the passage of the god, and that is the *kairos*. (...) The *kairos* is a second of eternity.” (Romeyer-Dherbey, 1999, p. 10, our translation)

<sup>12</sup> “Decreation: to make something created pass into the uncreated. Destruction: to make something created pass into nothingness. A blameworthy substitute for decreation. Creation is an act of love and it is perpetual. At each moment our existence is God’s love for us. But God can only love himself. His love for us is love for himself through us. Thus, he who gives us our being loves in us the acceptance of not being. (...) Relentless necessity, wretchedness, distress, the crushing burden of poverty and of labour which wears us out, cruelty, torture, violent death, constraint, disease – all these constitute divine love. It is God who in love withdraws from us so that we can love him. For if we were exposed to the direct radiance of his love, without the protection of space, of time and of matter, we should be evaporated like water in the sun; (...) Necessity is the screen set between God and us so that we can be. (...) There exists a ‘deifugal’ force. Otherwise all would be God. (...) Renunciation: Imitation of God’s renunciation in creation. In a sense God renounces being everything. We should renounce being something. That is our only good. (...) We participate in the creation of the world by decreasing ourselves.” (Weil, 2003, pp. 32-33)

“The time of the technical operation is not a stable, unified, homogeneous reality that the consciousness could grasp; it is an acted time [*author’s note*: in the sense of God’s destined time to act – here, the divine decisiveness<sup>13</sup> signifying directly a fullness of time “sealed” by a God who acted once for all time], the time of the opportunity to seize, of *kairos*, this point where the human action comes to meet a natural process that unfolds at its own pace [*author’s note*: that develops in the rhythm of its own duration]. The craftsman, in order to be able to intervene with his tool, must appreciate and wait for the moment when the situation is ripe, he must know how to submit himself entirely to the occasion. Never should he leave his job, says Plato, if he doesn’t want to let the *kairos* pass and see the work wasted [*author’s note*: *alternative translation*: as this could result in letting the *kairos* pass and in seeing the entire work spoiled].” (Vernant, 1969, p. 242, our translation) \*

If the personalized (limited and exhaustible) name of *tension* is “*despair*” [*Fortvivelse*], its *phenomenal* (impersonal), trans-dimensional (trans-contextual) and infernally purifying name is “leap” (the acme moment of the unleashed *nameless* forces of transition and transformation). In the very moment of this leap, man leaves (or, better said, is brutally expelled from) both the ethical and the aesthetical stages, and finds himself, like Abraham (alone in front of “God”), alone and “naked” (deprived of any possible membranes or protective middle-positions that could filter for him this unprecedented impact) in front of this massive force of creation and destruction (now, for him the time stands still and creates an infernal-eternal [interminable] second):

“In Kierkegaard’s view, the ‘leap’ of faith constitutes entrance into the religious sphere and the highest form of individuation. Here, the operative categories are neither pleasure and pain, as in the aesthetic sphere, nor good and evil, as in the ethical, but sin and grace. The model is Abraham, who in the story from Genesis was ready to sacrifice his only son in obedience to God’s command, notwithstanding the Divine promise that the old man would be the father ‘of many nations’. The temporal dimension of this extraordinary event is the ‘instant’ wherein this ‘infinite’ movement is made. The categories of the ethical are suspended in response to a divine command addressed to Abraham alone by name. In this sense, the motives for the actions at the religious stage cannot be generalized as the ethical requires. In other words,

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<sup>13</sup> Romeyer-Dherbey for example, explains this divine decisiveness with direct reference to man’s illumination through fortune, i.e. *through the pulsatile trace (now acting as Heidegger’s “Heim”, as dwelling-place) left “behind” by the passage of a pure and infernal energy*: “*Kairos* (...) is a gift, and the gift is a *kairos*; the intervention of God in the fate of the mortals alters the temporality, and we now understand that one of the meanings of *kairos* has designated the fleeting moment when everything is decided, when the duration takes a turn favourable to our wishes.” (Romeyer-Dherbey, 1999, p. 9, our translation)

the religious individual is 'beyond good and evil', in Nietzschean terms, and accordingly can be considered to be acting immorally [*author's note*: but also immortally, as he is now "powered" by the vortex of itself {of creation and destruction}]. In ethical terms, Abraham has no words by which to explain his singular action to his wife. He can rely neither on the surety of general principles nor the support of universal reason. He is alone before God – the consummate individual. Abraham stands out from such anonymous refuge (he 'exists') in the most extreme manner. As he makes this move beyond the ethical, he experiences the anguish (*Angst*) of his freedom, even as he knows the risk that this command, so contrary to general moral principles, might not be Divine in origin." (Flynn, 2006, p. 34)

Both Weils's decreation and Derrida's deconstruction<sup>14</sup> are achieved by means of a Kierkegaardian "leap", i.e. by a direct flammable violence exercised on the very ember of the previous inscription of the transcendental in our reality level; by a decisive arousal (incitement) punctured in the very delicate tip of the horn of despair (over-deceived and over-betrayed expectancy) and of virtue (merciless and stonifying [related *avant-la-lettre* to Freud's death-drive towards the mineral] Platonic intercrossing with one's predestined [unnegotiable] prototype) alike, or on the tip of the tongue of the dragon of phenomenal retribution and of reversion of ontological stakes and hungers. Derrida sees this paradoxical prolific duality enacted by means of a leap as a reformulation of creation (as a resourceful reassembling of the engine of creation) through a constant play of tensions:

"[*author's note*: Derrida would also invoke, at the pinnacle of his deconstructive apparatus, the leap, i.e. –] a taking of a stand when there is no adequate justification for taking a stand. In this regard, Derrida cites Kierkegaard: 'The instant of decision is a madness' – the movement of the individual as such beyond the universal. But this leap does not take us beyond the realm of law [*author's note*: or any other discipline or field of study] as such. It moves beyond previous formulations (...) but must in turn justify itself by constructing a new, more adequate system of law that will, of course, itself be subject to deconstruction. In contrast to dangerous irrationalisms (for example [...] religious fanaticism) that leave reason behind in a flood of mere will or emotion, Derrida's deconstructive approach always subjects our 'leaps' beyond one system of rational thought to the constraint of constructing a new system of rational thought. In this way, he balances reason and a sense of its limitations against one another in a constant play of tensions." (Gutting in Bunnin and Tsui-James, 2003, p. 871)

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<sup>14</sup> Weil's "decreation" being a transformation from the same phenomenal family as Lacan's "*dés-être*" (the time of the ultimate separation erupted from the desire to attain the absolute difference) and preparing the ground for Derrida's "deconstruction".

At this point, we are forced to improvise and use in a massive proportion the speculative-in-its-turn exegetical apparatus, because the Danish equivalent of the expression “leap into faith” [*Troens Spring*] is never-ever used as such in Kierkegaard’s published writings and, even stranger, is the fact that even if Kierkegaard re-installs in-between-the-lines this type of tension as the driving principle (force) of reality, he still avoids using the terms “faith” and “leap” in the same context. When he discusses (addresses) the issue of leap he simply avoids linking it to the notion of faith just as well as he refrains himself from discussing about faith in terms of leap:

“Nothing is as swift as a blink of the eye, yet it is commensurable with the content of the eternal... (...). A blink is therefore a designation of time, but mark well, of time in the fateful conflict when it is touched by eternity. What we call the moment, Plato calls το ἐξαίφνη [the sudden]...it is related to the category of the invisible... The Latin term is momentum (from *movere* [to move]), which by derivation expresses the merely vanishing.” (Kierkegaard, 1980, p. 88)

That is why, our only final choice in here is to methodologically “divorce” the notion of *leap* from that of *faith* and to treat it phenomenologically, according to the paradoxical<sup>15</sup>, non-conceptual and purely transitional virtues that the notion of leap withholds (conceals)...since Plato’s *Parmenides*:

“This ‘now’ (...) lies between ‘was’ and ‘will become’, and naturally ‘the one’ cannot, in passing from the past to the future, bypass this ‘now’ (...) In the most recent philosophy, abstraction culminates in pure being, but pure being is the most abstract expression for eternity, and again as ‘nothing’ it is precisely the moment.” (Kierkegaard, 1980, p. 84)

This category of transition, this “presence without an assignable present” (“la présence sans present assignable” as Virgil Ciomoş would label the phenomenon), this being itself of conversion is perhaps best “apprehensible” in that unique celebration (and elevation) of the human gestures known as the ballet:

“(...) the figure of the ballet dancer as he or she leaps into the air and returns to the ground again provocatively mirrors the leap of faith. LaMothe, for example, suggests that the very shape of the ballet leap is itself significant for understanding (...) faith:

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<sup>15</sup> A paradox which, “incidentally” being said, perfectly defines our postmodernity: “The high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is. Baudelairean modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it.” (Foucault, 1984, p. 41)

‘The leap is a movement in which a dancer springs off the ground with one foot, hovers for a moment off the ground, and then lands on the other foot. As such, it embodies in one explosive action a double movement – a movement of leaving the earth and returning to it, like the knight of faith. In a leap, as in faith, although the two movements contradict one another (going up, going down), they appear in that act as one seamless arc, connecting earth to earth... the unity exists in the form of a singular, temporal finite act. It exists only in passing – in the flash of its occurrence.’ (LaMothe, “The Poet and the Dancer”, p. 92)<sup>16</sup>

The shape of the ballet leap, in the way that it connects earth to earth, calls to mind the bridging of heaven and earth characteristic of faith<sup>17</sup>. The balletic leap as a leap of faith thus unifies in the moment of its performance the temporal and the divine.

Edwin Denby’s description of the leap likewise lends itself well to such a comparison of the leap and faith (...):

‘The most obvious test for the dancer comes in the descent from the air, in the recovery from the leap. She has to catch herself in a knee bend that begins with the speed she falls at, and progressively diminishes so evenly that you don’t notice the transition from the air to the ground...[t]his is the «divine moment» that makes her look as if she alighted like a feather. It doesn’t happen when she lands, you see, it happens later. After that, straightening up from the bend must have the feeling of a new start; it is no part of the jump, it is a new breath, a preparation for the next thing she means to do.’ (Denby, “Flight of the Dancer”, p. 26)<sup>18</sup>.” (Kramer in Bartley Stewart, 2009, p. 73)

*And it is indeed at the level of the tensest paradox of the kairos that Kierkegaard brings his most important contribution to the definition of man’s initial becoming; of his first step out of animality (and perhaps even out of his physical and metaphysical mineralness – if we are to recall to mind the idea from which we have started this study – the death-drive as the answer to “the seduction of terminal*

<sup>16</sup> Nathaniel Kramer’s reference: Kimerer L. LaMothe, “The Poet and the Dancer”, in her *Between Dancing and Writing: The Practice of Religious Studies*, New York: Fordham University Press 2004. pp. 85-102.

<sup>17</sup> An extra-explanation in what concerns the ways in which dancing configures, reproduces and also produces the religious feeling, can be found in the following passage: “(...) ‘the metaphoric weight of the image [of the dancer] does not depend on an opposition of the bodily to the intellectual, the outer to the inner, or the emotional to the rational. Dancing appears as religion. It appears as a way of inhabiting religion; it engages thinking, feeling, and enacting...in Kierkegaard’s work, «dancing» has a meaning as a kind of doing that eludes the grasp of philosophical writing.’ ” (LaMothe, “The Poet and the Dancer”, p. 85, in Kramer, 2009, p. 80).

<sup>18</sup> Nathaniel Kramer’s reference: Edwin Denby, “Flight of the Dancer” in his *Looking at the Dance*, New York: Horizon Press, 1968. pp. 23-9.

calm, a slipping back into the quiescence of the inorganic, back towards the slower rhythms of geological time"<sup>19</sup> [Lukes, 2013, p. 75]), *into humanity*. Consequently we reach here what Kierkegaard ultimately labelled as “‘Christianity’s crucial criterion’<sup>20</sup> – the *acceptance of an objective uncertainty that is inaccessible to reason* but through which, with divine help, salvation is alone to be found.” (Gardiner, 1988, p. 109): “(...) human existence takes the form of a ‘constant striving’, seeking a fulfilment that lies beyond the temporal sphere and which is only attainable by our freely committing ourselves to a power that transcends objective knowledge and rational comprehension.” (Gardiner, 1988, p. 109)

But (and Kierkegaard constantly insists on this aspect) it is precisely this *inconsistency* that constantly demands the *kairos* (one that cannot be eradicated and one that constantly compromises both the ontological and the phenomenal completion of all relevant and irrelevant matters) that keeps the vacuous (and its reverberations in the human mind) active and dangerously-creative, by means of its communication medium (amniotic fluid) with the humans, which is *anxiety*.

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel Lukes’ reference for this line: J. G. Ballard, *The Crystal World* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux: New York, 1966), 111.

<sup>20</sup> We consider that the „God” that Kierkegaard speaks about in his works is not at all the canonical (be it as metaphorical and as allegorical as the holy texts may twist its meaningful appearances) God of Christianity, but primarily an *avant la lettre* phenomenological divinity – that is, *this new God is the infernally blooming tension itself of transition...* an acontextual power of the Being that turned Adam into a creature best interrogated by Herman Melville in his *Moby Dick*: “Then tell me; art thou not an arrant, all-grasping, inter-meddling, monopolizing, heathenish old scamp, to be one day making legs, and the next day coffins to clap them in, and yet again life-buoys out of those same coffins?” (Melville, 2014, p. 298)



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## IDENTITE NARRATIVE ET EXPERIENCES DE L'INJUSTICE

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**RÉSUMÉ.** La prise en compte de la part des différentes sciences humaines de la souffrance et des inégalités induites par l'expérience de l'injustice s'est largement développée et greffée à l'étude de la narrativité. Il s'agit alors d'introduire le concept ricoeurien d'identité narrative dans l'expérience de l'injustice pour évaluer ses possibilités pour la reconnaissance d'injustice et ses enjeux éthiques.

**Mots-clés:** *identité narrative, expérience de l'injustice, parcours de la reconnaissance, éthique, praxis du récit.*

« Le sens de l'injustice n'est pas seulement plus poignant, mais plus perspicace que le sens de la justice ; car la justice est plus souvent ce qui manque et l'injustice ce qui règne, et les hommes ont une vision plus claire de ce qui manque aux relations humaines que de la manière droite de les organiser. »

Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures 1*, Seuil, Paris, 1999, p. 177

### Introduction

Sur le plan social et politique, le thème de la reconnaissance d'expériences de l'injustice est particulièrement prégnant. Les études portant sur des thèmes tels que l'injustice et la reconnaissance se sont largement développées, tant en philosophie qu'en sociologie ou en psychologie sociale et clinique, ainsi que l'attention portée aux récits d'expériences d'injustice sociale. Il est parfois opposé à l'intérêt porté à l'expérience de l'injustice qu'elle est un objet trop peu déterminé, flou, soumis à une appréciation subjective et peu encline à subir une analyse de type systématique. Quelle est son statut philosophique ? L'expérience croise à la fois les domaines psychologique, sociologique, éthique, politique. On doit aussi faire face à des complications épistémologiques sur les critères de l'injustice. L'expérience de l'injustice, pourtant, ne peut pas être un "en-deçà" de l'analyse philosophique, puisqu'elle fait la connexion d'un élément social avec une subjectivité.

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Si nous considérons la question de l'expérience de l'injustice, c'est qu'elle nous semble nous dire plusieurs choses, nous éclairer sur différents points : à la fois sur de nouvelles orientations possibles de recherches en philosophie contemporaine et sociale, mais aussi parce que l'attachement au phénomène de l'expérience de l'injustice mène à des interrogations renouvelées sur l'intersubjectivité. Paul Ricoeur justifie l'évocation de l'expérience de l'injustice en soulignant l'antériorité phénoménologique de l'expérience de l'injustice par rapport à la quête du sens du juste. Il suffit de se souvenir de cette plainte d'enfant "c'est injuste !" comme d'un cri du coeur lancé à son entourage pour rappeler ses droits<sup>2</sup>. L'expérience de l'injustice pourrait donc être comme un signal de mise en mouvement en direction d'une mise en analyse de la justice. Mais pas uniquement : l'expérience de l'injustice ne vaut pas uniquement en tant que préliminaire à la recherche des critères de la justice, ou à la définition du juste. L'expérience de l'injustice doit aussi être comprise comme déni de justice en tant que tel. En d'autres termes, l'analyse ne se situe pas en dehors de l'expérience mais il s'agit de penser à travers elle. Le choix du terme d'expérience de l'injustice vise la manière dont on fait son expérience, c'est-à-dire plus précisément l'intégration propre à chaque individu de cette expérience de l'injustice sociale.

Ce n'est pas un parcours définitionnel qui est ici proposé, dans le sens où l'objectif de notre démarche ne sera pas de proposer des critères à l'expérience de l'injustice comme peut le suggérer l'idée de reconnaissance comme identification dans le *Parcours de la reconnaissance* de Paul Ricoeur. Il s'agit plutôt d'en dégager des stratégies d'action ou de réaction face à l'expérience de l'injustice, du côté de la *praxis*. Cette interrogation sur la praxis consiste à poser les questions suivantes : comment cette expérience de l'injustice peut ou non prendre part à un de la reconnaissance ? Quelle est l'importance que peut revêtir le récit de l'expérience de l'injustice dans la reconnaissance sociale ? Quel parcours de la reconnaissance de l'expérience de l'injustice se dessine au travers du récit de soi ? Comment le récit de soi permet de rendre audible des expériences d'injustice ?

S'il est possible d'envisager un parcours de la reconnaissance à l'aide de l'identité narrative, il faudra le distinguer toutefois d'"éthique de la présence" pour reprendre l'expression de Rosanvallon<sup>3</sup>. Il désigne sous cette expression le fait de désigner, de dire, de montrer les formes d'injustices pour une reconnaissance dans le but "d'être entendus", comme point final et but de ce parcours de la reconnaissance : une présentation d'expériences, et non un projet de transformation de ces expériences

<sup>2</sup> « C'est à dessein qu'évoquant des souvenirs d'enfance je nomme l'injuste et non le juste... Notre première entrée dans la région du droit n'a-t-elle pas été marquée par le cri : c'est injuste ! Ce cri est celui de l'indignation, dont la perspicacité est parfois confondante, mesurée à l'aune des hésitations d'adultes sommés de se prononcer sur le juste en termes positifs. », Paul Ricoeur, *Le juste*, Esprit, 1995, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Rosanvallon, *La Légitimité démocratique. Impartialité, réflexivité, proximité*, Seuil, Paris, 2008.

de l'injustice sociale. Si l'on peut définir l'expérience de l'injustice comme un vécu individuel fondateur de notre insertion ou perception de notre environnement social, alors la narration de l'expérience individuelle en est une partie constitutive, dans le sens où le récit donne à voir, entendre, ressentir.

Par ailleurs, si l'on soutient, avec Paul Ricoeur, que l'identité narrative peut fonder une éthique de réflexivité sur différentes formes d'expériences de l'injustice, elle est aussi le nom d'un problème, comme le souligne Paul Ricoeur lui-même. En effet, et c'est pour cela qu'il en appelle à une éthique de l'identité narrative, il est crucial de mettre en lumière les échecs d'un tel parcours de reconnaissance de l'expérience de l'injustice. Tout à la fois *vécu* et *sentiment* d'injustice<sup>4</sup>, l'expérience dont il est question est tout autant le lieu d'un grand silence, non seulement d'une partie des recherches sur ces thématiques, mais aussi des personnes concernées par ces expériences d'injustice et dans les actions politiques. L'étude des récits d'expériences d'injustice ne peut se passer de l'étude des silences concernant ces expériences.

Ce qui n'apparaît pas dans les récits, ce qui n'est pas raconté, ce qui n'est pas mis en mot ou écouté, entendu, pris en compte *dit* aussi *en creux* quelque chose sur l'expérience de l'injustice. Dès lors, comment envisager la prise en considération de ces non-récits ? Car pour qu'il y ait récit d'expérience et reconnaissance de ces récits, il nécessite la possibilité de former le récit qui sera entendu. Face à cette aporie, que peut l'identité narrative ? Est-elle toujours encore un vecteur de reconnaissance de soi par les autres (institutionnels aussi) ? En d'autres termes, dans quelles conditions peut-on se raconter, utiliser le levier du récit pour transformer l'expérience de l'injustice ?

Au lieu d'affronter une éthique narrative à une politique de la reconnaissance, il s'agit ici plutôt, non de trouver un consensus entre deux voies théorique de la reconnaissance, mais de souligner les enjeux pragmatiques de la question. Ces enjeux pragmatiques sont ceux des stratégies employées face à l'impossibilité de se raconter, de faire récit de l'expérience de l'injustice. L'identité narrative se situe dans l'espace public et politique et constitue un enjeu de la reconnaissance de soi après l'expérience de l'injustice. Nous nous efforcerons de montrer ses possibilités et son fonctionnement.

### **Une compréhension philosophique et éthique des expériences de l'injustice**

Les expériences de l'injustice sociale des individus ou des groupes sociaux peuvent être de natures différentes et s'ajouter les unes aux autres. Ainsi, les expériences d'injustice deviennent capitales pour comprendre des mécanismes

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<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Renault, *L'expérience de l'injustice. Reconnaissance et clinique de l'injustice*, La Découverte, Paris, 2004.

d'exclusion, de marginalisation ou de non-réponse institutionnelle face à ces différentes injustices.

Paul Ricoeur ne traite pas en tant que telle l'expérience de l'injustice, mais il en parle comme point de départ pour développer son analyse de la justice, notamment à partir de John Rawls. S'il en fait état, c'est pour souligner son antériorité phénoménologique à l'analyse théorique du juste. Préliminaire à l'étude de la justice, l'expérience de l'injustice est ramenée au cri du cœur de l'enfant "c'est injuste !" et qui garde sa pertinence à l'âge adulte, dans la révolte contre l'expérience que l'on fait d'une situation injuste. C'est faire le choix de se consacrer aux manières d'agir, au plan pratique : quelles stratégies sont adoptées ou peuvent être adoptées après avoir fait une expérience de l'injustice ? Qu'est ce qu'on entend par "expérience de l'injustice" ? En effet, on se réservera de tracer une frontière dans ce que nous considérerons par la suite. Une expérience de l'injustice désigne donc ici à la fois le *vécu* et le *sentiment* du mépris de droits, d'identités. Elle peut être considérée comme une "expérience négative dotée de ressources cognitives propres"<sup>5</sup>, ressources cognitives portant "à la fois sur la situation vécue comme injuste et sur les principes qui permettent de qualifier cette situation comme injuste"<sup>6</sup>. A partir du sentiment d'injustice peut se former un récit de l'expérience, *praxis* narrative visant une transformation d'une situation sociale donnée.

L'intérêt de l'expérience de l'injustice pour la philosophie contemporaine est manifeste dans l'œuvre de Paul Ricoeur. Il repère trois types d'expériences de l'injustice : les rétributions disproportionnées, les promesses trahies et les partages inégaux<sup>7</sup>. Dans son anthropologie, Ricoeur insiste sur deux faces de la vie humaines. L'homme est à la fois souffrant et agissant. Cette souffrance, engendrée notamment par la vulnérabilité face aux expériences d'injustice, est caractérisée par l'intersubjectivité<sup>8</sup>. En effet, l'homme qui souffre est vulnérable dans les rapports de reconnaissance. L'expérience de l'injustice s'insère dans cette anthropologie de l'homme souffrant et agissant. Si l'on insiste à travers cette esquisse de l'expérience de l'injustice au premier pôle, l'expérience de l'injustice ne peut être déconnectée de la seconde partie qui nous constitue chez Ricoeur : l'action, la possibilité d'agir, malgré ou à partir de la souffrance.

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<sup>5</sup> Emmanuel Renault, *L'expérience de l'injustice. Reconnaissance et clinique de l'injustice*, La Découverte, Paris, 2004, p. 51.

<sup>6</sup> Emmanuel Renault, *L'expérience de l'injustice. Reconnaissance et clinique de l'injustice*, La Découverte, Paris, 2004, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Le Juste, I*, Esprit, 1995, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Emmanuel Renault, *L'expérience de l'injustice. Reconnaissance et clinique de l'injustice*, La Découverte, Paris, 2004 : "La subjectivité individuelle est toujours prise dans une intersubjectivité sociale institutionnellement structurée", p.131.

L'expérience de l'injustice a donc aussi comme intérêt pratique de guider une *praxis* de la reconnaissance. Par des stratégies de contournement, de dégagement, de défense<sup>9</sup>, définies par Vincent de Gaulejac selon le degré d'intériorisation de l'image négative de soi-même à travers l'expérience de l'injustice, les individus traduisent l'expérience de l'injustice de différentes manières. Ce terme de stratégie désigne "les comportements, individuels ou collectifs, conscients ou inconscients, adaptés ou inadaptés, mis en œuvre pour atteindre certaines finalités. Ces finalités sont définies par les individus en fonction de leur évaluation de la situation d'interaction, c'est-à-dire de l'importance des contraintes extérieures et de leurs propres capacités d'action"<sup>10</sup>. Le fait que l'expérience de l'injustice engage différents types de stratégies que nous ne développons pas ici nous permet d'envisager ce que peut constituer l'identité narrative de Paul Ricoeur : un type de stratégie de reconnaissance des expériences d'injustice sociale par le récit de soi. La reconnaissance ne serait donc pas seulement l'affirmation positive de soi ou d'un groupe, mais aussi une contestation potentiellement narrative. C'est le sens des campagnes contre la violence contre les femmes avec un slogan "Libérons la parole" ou l'ouverture de lieux d'écoute : le récit de l'expérience permet la prise en compte sociale d'un fait lui aussi social.

Il s'agit donc de montrer ici comment l'expérience de l'injustice est considérée comme un objet de recherche à part entière avec ses potentialités critiques. L'expérience sociale négative est le moteur dans la lutte pour la reconnaissance et Ricoeur le souligne dans une partie dédiée ainsi nommée "Sentiments négatifs comme ressorts significatifs de la lutte pour la reconnaissance" :

"l'indignation constitue à cet égard la structure de transition entre le mépris ressenti dans l'émotion de la colère et la volonté de devenir un partenaire dans la lutte pour la reconnaissance."<sup>11</sup>

Pour faire entendre ces injustices, on doit envisager, à l'aide de l'identité narrative développée par Paul Ricoeur, la possibilité d'une médiation qui serait le récit. Parce que tout mépris ressenti ne donne pas lieu à la lutte pour la reconnaissance de l'injustice subie, l'identité narrative est envisagée à travers ses potentialités pratiques, ses potentialités d'agir.

### **Les récits d'expériences vers une reconnaissance de l'injustice**

Ce qui permet d'enclencher le mécanisme de mobilisation contre les injustices dont les individus peuvent faire l'expérience serait le retour réflexif sur le vécu de cette expérience, que le sentiment d'injustice se raconte dans un moment de retour sur le vécu. En tant que "sujet souffrant et agissant", le sujet se raconte.

<sup>9</sup> Vincent de Gaulejac et Taboada Léoetti, *La lutte des places*, Desclée de Brouwer, 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Vincent de Gaulejac et Taboada Léoetti, *La lutte des places*, Desclée de Brouwer, 1994, p. 184.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Parcours de la reconnaissance*, Stock, 2004, p. 313.



Le concept d'identité narrative que développe Paul Ricoeur s'inscrit pleinement dans ce cadre évoqué précédemment, d'une philosophie qui traite du « sujet souffrant et agissant ». L'identité narrative permet de faire lien entre le *pathos* du ressentir et la *praxis* de la mise en action, du mouvement. Ainsi, la fonction attribuable à l'identité narrative est celle de la reconstitution de soi et de l'expérience de l'injustice par la médiatisation du récit.

L'identité narrative se définit comme la capacité de formuler un récit de manière mettre en concordance les expériences de vie d'un individu. Elle caractérise le rétablissement d'une temporalisation spécifique en rendant le soi mouvant, et en instituant une continuité dans les expériences éparses, pour les faire siennes. Cela constitue un autre pôle de l'identité que celui défini par Ricoeur comme l'identité-mêmeté, qui serait une identité figée dans le temps et qu'il appelle *caractère*. On peut voir déjà une première implication éthique dans cette distinction<sup>12</sup> : l'identité narrative permet à un individu ayant vécu un certain type d'expérience d'injustice sociale de ne pas se définir à travers elle, comme une identité immuable. L'identité qui se raconte est l'occasion, à travers un récit d'expérience, d'entrevoir la diversité des expériences traversées.

Ricoeur introduit à ce stade l'idée d'*histoire d'une vie* comme une *histoire racontée*<sup>13</sup>. La connexion d'une vie dans la diversité de ses expériences se trouve par la médiation du récit. À l'aide du paradigme littéraire, Ricoeur montre à voir la possibilité d'un narrateur homodiégétique, personne présente dans son récit, qui forme le texte de ses expériences.

Raconter, faire un récit, c'est partager des expériences. Par le fait de mettre en récit les expériences, les individus permettent l'opération de refiguration, c'est-à-dire qu'il est possible de prendre une certaine distance avec l'expérience pour se rendre observateur et évaluer le vécu et le sentiment de l'injustice. L'identité narrative peut aussi se déployer dans le cadre d'expériences d'injustice partagée ou collective, car comme le souligne Ricoeur :

“La notion d'identité narrative montre encore sa fécondité en ceci qu'elle s'applique aussi bien à la communauté qu'à l'individu. On peut parler de l'ipséité d'une communauté, comme on vient de parler de celle d'un sujet individuel : individu et communauté se constituent dans leur identité en recevant tels récits qui deviennent pour l'un comme pour l'autre leur histoire effective.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit (3. Le temps raconté)*, Seuil, Paris, 1985, p. 442 : « Le soi-même peut ainsi être dit refiguré par l'application réflexive des configurations narratives. À la différence de l'identité abstraite du Même, l'identité narrative, constitutive de l'ipséité, peut inclure le changement, la mutabilité, dans la cohésion d'une vie.”

<sup>13</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit (1. L'intrigue et le récit historique)*, Seuil, 1983.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit (3. Le temps raconté)*, Seuil, Paris, 1985, p. 442.

Le récit de soi est aussi un récit collectif, fait de l'entrelacement des récits d'expériences d'une communauté ou collectivité. Ce récit devient une "proposition de monde" à travers la refiguration. En effet, non seulement il permet d'instaurer une distance vis-à-vis de l'expérience vécue, mais le récit d'expérience laisse entrevoir les capacités pour engager une transformation. L'unification narrative des expériences d'injustice laisse entrevoir une ouverture (l'œuvre ouverte comme l'appelle Ricœur) qui est à la fois narrative, éthique et politique. Le récit ouvre la possibilité d'une transformation du sentir et de l'agir des individus concernés, du sentiment qui accompagne le vécu de l'expérience. Encore faut-il que ce récit trouve un écho, une écoute. Le récit doit se formuler comme un témoignage, caractérisé par un monde intersubjectivement partagé comme le souligne Ricœur. Et le témoignage, pour être institutionnellement reconnu, nécessite une attestation. Or, "il est des témoins qui ne rencontrent jamais l'audience capable de les écouter et de les entendre"<sup>15</sup>.

Ricœur pointe alors lui-même cette aporie du témoignage : la parole qui ne peut justement jamais accéder au statut du témoignage, par rapport à son point caractéristique comme rapport en dialogue, entendu, accrédité. Ricœur ouvre lui-même la réflexion quant au récit qui ne peut prendre place dans un espace où il serait entendu. C'est là le point crucial pour la reconnaissance des expériences d'injustices : ceux qui ne sont pas entendus, ne peuvent être entendus.

### **Faire face aux apories de l'identité narrative**

Ce qui reste en suspens dans l'injonction à faire le récit de ses expériences d'injustice sociale sont les obstacles à la narration. Ricœur évoque d'ailleurs la mémoire empêchée ou manipulée et l'impossibilité de se raconter. Les échecs de la narration de soi sortent-ils automatiquement la narration des expériences individuelles du champ de l'interpellation, de l'appel de reconnaissance ? Face aux apories du récit de soi se dressent les enjeux éthiques et politiques concernant l'identité narrative.

« L'identité narrative devient ainsi le titre d'un problème, au moins autant que celui d'une solution. (...) en ce sens, le récit appartient déjà au champ éthique de la prétention, inséparable de la narration, à la justesse éthique. »<sup>16</sup>

Non seulement le récit de l'expérience de l'injustice subie peut, comme nous l'avons expliqué auparavant concernant l'identité narrative, permettre la refiguration de soi, mais aussi s'insère-t-il plus généralement dans la réflexion sur les institutions justes. Si je fais l'expérience de l'injustice, que des récits nous

<sup>15</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, p. 193 et 194.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit (3. Le temps raconté)*, Seuil, Paris, 1985, p. 358.

parviennent de ces injustices, alors nous pouvons intégrer ce récit à une mise en forme des normes qui garantissent une protection contre ces injustices. De la même manière, l'impossibilité de narrativiser ses expériences ou de les faire entendre indique que les normes des récits d'expériences d'injustice sociale sont aussi institutionnellement déterminés. En effet, si le récit d'expérience peut permettre de remettre en question les normes d'une société donnée, l'absence ou le silence autour de récit donnent à voir la non-reconnaissance sociale de certaines expériences.

Damien Tissot rapporte dans un article l'expérience de femmes maltraitées, que l'obstacle majeur à la comparution devant la justice de tels cas est l'impossibilité pour les femmes battues de présenter leur expérience, soit qu'elles aient intériorisé l'injustice subie, soit qu'elles pensent ne pas pouvoir être entendues<sup>17</sup>. Cet exemple n'est pas anodin : il illustre des types d'expériences où des individus ne reconnaissent pas pour eux-mêmes le *sentiment* d'injustice, malgré le *vécu* de l'injustice. Non dites, elles ne peuvent être prises en compte. Non racontées, ces expériences restent dans les marges de la reconnaissance sociale et ne peuvent être entendues. Ces expériences sortent de l'espace social comme espace de narration. Isolées, elles ne sont plus reconnues comme des expériences qui concernent le collectif. A cet égard, l'expérience de l'injustice n'est pas dans le domaine privé, et un des enjeux éthiques de ces récits est de l'intégrer à un monde commun.

Ricoeur a posé lui-même les limites lorsqu'il développait et expliquait l'identité narrative dans *Soi-même comme un autre*. Autrement dit, l'identité narrative n'est pas la solution automatique à l'aporie dont nous avons parlé. En fait, cette limitation dont parle Ricoeur à sa propre conception de l'identité narrative ne doit plus en être une selon lui si, et seulement si, on replace l'identité narrative dans un contexte éthique, dans la *praxis* du récit de soi. L'identité narrative constitue même en elle-même un parcours éthique. A partir du paradigme littéraire, dans lequel le lecteur découvre d'autres possibilités de mondes, dans la lecture de l'œuvre ouverte, le sujet souffrant et agissant peut donc mettre en œuvre une *praxis*, qui est celle de la transformation des possibilités imaginées.

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<sup>17</sup> « Être fidèle à soi. Féminisme, éthique et justice à la lumière de la philosophie de Paul Ricoeur », Damien Tissot, *Etudes Ricoeuriennes / Ricoeur Studies*, Vol. 4, n°1 (2013), pp. 92-112.

p. 105: « Dans de nombreux pays, les violences conjugales ne sont presque jamais rapportées à la police. Soit que les victimes pensent ne pouvoir jamais être entendues par la justice, soit qu'elles aient intériorisé ces violences comme les conséquences de ce qu'elles croient être leur infériorité naturelle, ces personnes, pour la plupart, ont, sous une forme ou sous une autre, perdu l'estime d'elles-mêmes. Pour pouvoir se présenter devant un tribunal, il faut pouvoir se raconter. Raconter son histoire. Être capable de dire « je ». Le récit de « soi », que les institutions judiciaires – historiques, contingentes, imparfaites, donc – entendront, et sur la base duquel elles rendront justice, sera bien entendu incomplet, parcellaire, fragmenté. »

On note donc une grande prudence de la part de Ricœur, pour qui l'identité narrative n'est pas la solution ultime aux apories de la reconnaissance du récit : l'identité narrative ne garantit pas une compréhension grâce à la médiation des récits. Non seulement il y a les échecs dans les tentatives de récits de soi (on n'arrive pas à donner du sens à des événements qui ont eu cours dans une vie) mais on peut penser donc aussi aux impossibilités de la mise en récit. Ricœur est un philosophe de la « bonne distance », de la « juste distance » et dans sa prudence méthodologique, il y a aussi une prudence dans l'application de concepts, et dans notre cas, nous pouvons l'appliquer l'expérience de l'injustice.

Toutefois, même « une narration empêchée ou refusée témoigne encore du fait que la mise en récit est le problème par excellence de la construction des identités individuelles et collectives. Et c'est la raison pour laquelle il importe de repenser la problématique ricœurienne de l'identité narrative.<sup>18</sup> L'identité narrative comprend donc, dans ses limites propres, la potentialité d'une remise en question des normes. A partir d'expériences d'injustice, l'échec du récit est l'échec de reconnaissance d'injustice potentiellement collectivement partagées. Le désir de reconnaissance se fait jour dans le lieu même où il peut s'échouer. Cette insatisfaction née des failles de l'identité narrative est aussi un nœud, un « point de départ critique »<sup>19</sup> pour repenser les expériences d'injustice dans leurs particularités. L'hypothèse du récit de soi comme mise en scène d'une bonne ou juste distance transgressée comme l'exprime Paul Ricœur amène l'enjeu éthique suivant qui serait de rétablir une bonne distance : c'est même la démarche propre à l'identité narrative que de projeter l'expérience à distance de soi-même. Dans la méthodologie même de la « juste distance » au cœur de la narration de soi, la question de la justice est centrale. Elle est même plus : disons qu'elle est co-constitutive de l'attestation de soi, du parcours de la reconnaissance dans lequel prend place le récit de soi.

Le récit de soi envisagé par l'herméneutique de soi chez Ricœur n'est donc jamais en dehors du champ de la justice, à travers la mutualité et la réciprocité. Le récit de soi est appel de justice, mais les échecs de la narration, envisagés avec l'herméneutique de soi chez Ricœur, deviennent le nœud autour duquel se cristallisent les enjeux éthiques.

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<sup>18</sup> Johann Michel, « Narrativité, narration, narratologie : du concept ricœurien d'identité narrative aux sciences sociales », *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* [Online], XLI-125 | 2003, Online since 30 November 2009, connection on 20 February 2015. URL : <http://ress.revues.org/562>; DOI : 10.4000/ress.562.

<sup>19</sup> *Le récit de soi*, Judith Butler, PUF, 2007 (*Giving an account of oneself*, 2005), p.22 : « (...) ce questionnement fait partie du désir de reconnaissance, un désir qui ne peut trouver aucune satisfaction et dont le caractère insatisfait établit un point de départ critique pour remettre en question les normes présentes disponibles. »

En d'autres termes, Ricœur ne nie pas que l'identité narrative fait face à des apories, est limitée lorsque celle-ci n'est plus le lieu de l'attestation de soi et des autres. Il répond plutôt par une injonction éthique. Le « Me voici ! » contenu dans le récit de soi devient une exigence éthico-politique majeure. Au-delà même du « Me voici ! », c'est l'unité narrative d'une vie qui est posée comme possible, à défaut de l'unité du ou d'un « je ». A partir d'une herméneutique effective des conditions du récit de soi, se greffe l'éthique ricoeurienne : l'injonction éthique pour la narration des sujets s'inscrit dans un parcours de la reconnaissance.

### Conclusion

Paul Ricœur, philosophe du "sujet souffrant et agissant" a développé ce qu'il convient d'appeler l'"identité narrative". L'identité narrative s'entend de différentes manières et s'utilise dans des cadres de recherche en sciences sociales et de pratique très différents les uns des autres. Ce qui fait la particularité de Ricœur parmi l'abondante littérature sur ce sujet, c'est une théorisation propre qui met en jeu l'identité du sujet et une éthique singulière. La textualisation et la narration de l'identité n'est pas seulement une forme de compréhension de soi pour Ricœur, un mode de définition de nos identités, elle est aussi une injonction à se mettre en récit. Cependant, si tous les aspects de nos identités ne peuvent se comprendre comme une narration, l'identité narrative n'est-elle pas non plus unique, homogène, il n'y a pas une identité narrative, mais des narrations des identités, tout comme des narrations désidentifiantes. Le récit de soi conserve des conditions pour une identité narrative agissante qui inclue l'expérience de l'injustice. En effet, l'étude de l'expérience de l'injustice n'est jamais déconnectée d'un espace collectif régi par des règles, normes et lois.

Ce qui nous a intéressé ici est moins la considération pour le "juste" ou la "justice" que son pendant l'"injustice" et comment elle se révèle dans la puissance de l'expérience que l'on y fait. Mais la juste distance entre individus brisée dans l'expérience de l'injustice révèle cet espace rompu, qu'il s'agit de rétablir ou de reconstruire à travers notamment une mise en récit, et par la fondation d'institutions plus justes. Autrement dit, la question de l'expérience subjective ne saurait effacer les problèmes institutionnels et politiques que soulève l'injustice. Il ne s'agit pas seulement d'un problème privé mais d'un cas d'expériences vécues dans un espace public et commun. Le récit de soi concerne la restauration de l'estime de soi et les enjeux éthiques et politiques chez Ricœur. Il reste que l'identité narrative a permis de comprendre le lien incontournable qu'elle opère entre l'expérience de l'injustice et le désir de reconnaissance. Dans le schéma narratif et à la lumière du modèle du texte, le sujet se réapproprie un "soi" en réintégrant l'expérience de l'injustice dans la mise en intrigue, dans la pratique du conflit des interprétations.

Nous avons pu positionner les limites internes du récit dans la possibilité de mise à distance de soi de l'expérience de l'injustice à travers la refiguration. Mais les enjeux éthiques se trouvent aussi bien dans les limites externes du récit de l'expérience de l'injustice avec la réception possible ou non de ces récits d'expériences. Repenser les normes qui gouvernent nos possibilités de se raconter, aussi bien que – mais cela est indissociable – celles dans lesquelles l'injustice prend place est le défi éthique posé par l'identité narrative.



## PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS PRESENT IN QUESTIONS REGARDING MATHEMATICS TECHNOLOGY AND EDUCATION

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**ABSTRACT.** This article discusses how intentionality shows itself in cyberspace reality, where the phenomenon perceived stands out in the modern, contemporary life-world. We analyse the manifestation of human intentionality with the cybernetic life-world, based on a film (*Dèjá vu*, 2006), and underline the idea that this life-world we address sustains teaching and learning actions, among which to educate mathematically, to educate at distance and perceive the other as an equal, when being with the other who presents him/herself in the computer, through currently accessible gadgets. Moreover, we understand that this discussion opens new educational possibilities, to which we have to devote our attention.

**Keywords:** *mathematics education; technology; cyberspace; phenomenology; intentionality.*

### Philosophical Perspectives and the Question Guiding this Investigation

The question that fosters this investigation is: how does intentionality present itself in the cyberspace reality where the action of communicating with other human beings, in particular the action of communicating mathematically, with the support of the computer and the auxiliary scientific and technological gadgets? Why do we pose this question? Because we are puzzled by the fact that people spend hours facing a computer screen dialoguing with software, unveiling ways to operate them or having fun playing games, or communicating with other people, known to them or not — or even trying to learn something in e-learning scenarios. Remaining seated in front of a screen, eyes fixed on what it shows, attentive, following directions and information of all sorts, as well as engaging in dialogues that unfold in this kind of environment, may be a strenuous endeavour.

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It is in these efforts that our psychophysiological and intellectual stamina wears out. The own body, in its physical, psychic and spiritual totality, feels the effects of this undertaking. In such scenario, a question arises within us: then what keeps us connected, that is, attentive? We believe that it is intentionality. We must now leave it perfectly clear that, according to the conception we are working with, intentionality is no synonym of intentional act. We are talking about intentionality as conceived under Husserlian phenomenology. Below we underline some of the phenomenological ideas with which we work, though not in full detail, due to space limitations for this article:

- Intentionality. Chiefly in the thoughts of its founder, Edmund Husserl — is a characteristic of consciousness, and defines extending one's self to what lies within the field of view, bringing back what is seen to one's consciousness, which works out what is perceived based on the completion of the acts of precisely what is perceived (intuiting, fantasizing, abstracting, counting, organizing, etc.). It sustains our movement towards what is seen and the pathway back, holding what is perceived in our perception — hence the statement that consciousness embraces the totality of the world.

- Perception. The act of perceiving takes place only as long as the subject attentively turns him/herself to something — no matter whether an idea, an object manifested in its own physicality, a theory, an image, and so forth — and then wraps this something up in that invisible thread, that string which brings it back in as it is perceived, ahead of the acts of consciousness. It is an act that takes place at the present moment.

- Perception does not come to an end at this moment, since it always takes place in a continuous flow of retentions (preserving what occurred) and protrusions (envisaging what will come, as an expectation, for instance).

- Perception and what is perceived gain existence in the horizon-world (since they extend themselves before one's eye in the light of temporal dimensions of possible events), from spatial-temporal perspectives and, also, according to profiles through which what is perceived presents itself to perception.

- The conception of intentionality, consciousness and perception as embodied, in sense that they occur and constitute themselves in the own body (Merleau-Ponty, 1990) and is interwoven in a fabric that ends up as the standing ground of the life-world we live in. This notion is expressed by the word *Lebenswelt*, occurring in the original texts by Husserl (1970a), in German. The term refers to the world where we find ourselves all the time, the standing ground on which we grow as citizens side by side with our co-subjects and all historical-cultural products generated, as well as with nature, thus understood by the perceptive consciousness.

- Husserl (1970b) made a reduction of the *Lebenswelt* so as to understand what its invariants are. Yet, this life-world he mentions is the life-world as lived until the mid-1930s, the years when the author's last works were published. The study carried out by Husserl did not address, therefore, the reality in which information science and the resources that developed since the advent of the computer are present. Today, the reality of the life-world is not the same as the reality of the life-world as described by Husserl, though we cannot deny the conception that we live in the life-world, and that it is our perceptive ground.

The question that motivates us sets itself up in the leap we take in order to comprehend the worldly reality as a reality that also encompasses the reality of the cyberspace (Bicudo & Rosa, 2010). In this reality, in which we are with the other and together with the computer, and its information science apparatus on hand, which is in consequence a scientific and technological apparatus as well, we ask: how does intentionality present itself, that is, shows itself, in the reality of cyberspace, where the standing ground on which the perceived phenomenon becomes prominent is not that described by Husserl, the world he lived in at the end of the 1930's, when questioning the standing ground of science of the modern and contemporary western world? We also ask: how does intentionality show itself, sustaining teaching and learning actions, with the respective actions pertinent to this process, such as teaching mathematically, assessing the distance learning process, perceiving the other as an equal, accepting oneself as a professional of education who teaches and promotes collaborative knowledge, who acts responsibly when being with the other who presents him/herself with the computer, through the gadgets of the world of information science?

Based on the idea that, when we are using a computer, it presents itself to us in the activities we carry out, differently from a common utensil at hand to be used, as described and analysed by Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1962). It is with the subject conducting the operations, understanding the Heideggerian notion "being-in-the-world-with", written with hyphens to leave no doubt that it is a phrase, always expressing that we are constantly connected to the world, our standing ground-horizon where, through our actions, space is updated and time is perceived — and, more than this, that it is in this standing ground-horizon that we are with the other, whoever it is. In other words, with people, co-subjects, ideals, theories, utensils, animals, etc. This is the meaning of *with*. It means that we are together.

*Intentionality*, as understood and worked out by Husserl (1970a; 2002), in his dialectics of *see/seen*, or, phenomenologically speaking, *noesis/noema*<sup>3</sup> underlies the act carried out by the human being at the computer towards what the other says, that is, exposes. Herein, “what the other says” is a phrase used to clarify the modes through which the other and the respective environment manifest themselves in the screen, both through exposure of its image and through speeches intersected by dialogues, elaborate texts that reveal sophisticated thoughts, modes of calculation, simple or complex software, games, and artistic and scientific programs, etc. The connection with the other, this other being with the computer, demands the intentionality of the one/ones who keeps/keep in contact. The embodiment of the subject conceived now as the own body is, therefore, an inalienable mode through which this subject places itself as a ‘*Da-sein*’<sup>4</sup>. This mode of placing oneself as being in the world, being totally present in the world, is also the same as that of placing oneself before a computer screen as being in the openness of the horizon. It is the own body (Merleau-Ponty, 1994) who gives life and nurtures the cybernetic world that makes itself available for use, as a resource, and, more than that, which gives itself as *the other* — with whom we meet in the world. In search for the modes in which intentionality presents itself in situations where one is empathically with the other in cyberspace, we set out and resorted to films that exploit, in our understanding, these situations. There are movies which stand out mainly due to the fact that they make use of complex resources available as a product of scientific-technological investigations (Bicudo & Rosa, 2010). Essays of this kind have proved their relevance to enlarge the comprehension of intentionality itself, now made explicit in an aesthetic dimension, and with the potential to be visualized.

### **The Life-World Today and the Mode of Being in It**

The reality of the life-world, in which we are, is constituted by a reality woven by physicality in nature as felt and perceived at once in the hyletic layers<sup>5</sup> of the own body, by the network of scientific, artistic, religious, historical and cultural outputs

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<sup>3</sup> *Noesis/noema* is mentioned by Husserl in his various works. *Noesis* refers to the intentional act; *noema* is used with respect to what is wrapped by this act. For instance, there is a tree. Seeing the tree is an act of consciousness, and therefore intentional. There is a *noesis*. What is seen, the tree, is the *noema*.

<sup>4</sup> *Da-sein* is conceived by Heidegger (1962; p.80) as being-there and being-in, where ‘there’ is openness and ‘being-in-the world’ is the *Da-sein*’s essential state.

<sup>5</sup> Hyletic refers to the sensations, that is, the sensorial feeling that, phenomenologically, is taken as a starting point for the construction of the complexity of the subject understood as a totality embodied physically/psychically/spiritually (Husserl, 2002).

that materialize through different ways, among which the mode of cyberspace. In this sense, there one finds a whole scientific-technological apparatus that sustains actions and decisions, apart from modes of feeling and becoming present, of perceiving and bringing what is perceived to consciousness (Bicudo & Rosa, 2010). Nonetheless, significant is the fact that there is always the intentional eye, looking in search of something, which feeds this search and triggers actions. In order to understand this, we discuss scenes of the movie *Dèjà vu* (2006), mainly those in which the intentional eye shows itself as directed to the life-world of the main character, probing for relevant evidence to what is searched for and triggering decision-making and actions.

In Bicudo & Rosa (2010), the scenes of this film were described and numbered with a view to conducting a philosophical-scientific-technological analysis. In this paper we underline scene 17, when FBI agents equipped with state-of-the-art apparatus and top-line scientific and technological information are unable find evidence to solve a terrorist attack against a ferryboat that killed over 500 people, shown on screen. This reality is shown as flowing in a constant past time stream, chronologically stipulated as 4 days, 6 hours, 3 minutes and 45 seconds before. Thus projected, this reality shows itself as a set of senseless scenes. In order to cast a questioning eye focusing on meaningful scenes for that purpose, the FBI agents need the help of a person familiar with local investigations and therefore familiar with that reality and who is willing to watch (see) attentively. In this sense, the agents call on Doug, a detective allotted in that specific community's precinct, to help them. Scene 17:

The FBI agent in charge invites Doug to joint his team, since he is short of time to close the investigation. They need a person that watches the crime scene once only and perceives things that they, unfamiliar with the place, do not perceive. Technology: the team does not tell Doug what the machine they work with is about. Doug resists a little, but the team starts a game and drags him in: the call is a personal issue: the death of Larry<sup>6</sup>.

In this scene, there are at least two aspects that address the intentionality of the local detective: he is moved by the death of his partner in the attack, at the same time that he is driven to find and interpret evidence leading to a solution to the crime and the identification of the criminal. When Doug looks at the reality sliding on the screen, he sees that this reality is becoming the same reality he finds himself in, the totality of his own body. He feels emotions, reasons mathematically

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<sup>6</sup> Larry is Doug's partner

and/or logically, and moves. The act of perceiving places the detective in touch with what is projected on the screen. The detective, Doug, wants to know what he is dealing with, with respect to the technology available at the spot. He asks about the motion of scenes and the perception of temporality that comes about with this motion. The FBI task force answers:

It is not image that is moving. It is your vantage point that shifts. They explain: time passing is a constant, though we change the vantage point according to the data received, as fast as we wish. Do you understand? Doug: Yes, yes. No. (Bicudo & Rosa, 2010).

In this scene, we see stressed, once again, the importance of vantage point for the one who sees. What vantage point is this? What reference does it take? In phenomenological philosophy, this is the point that indicates all and every perspective given by the own body. The own body is the starting point from which the eye casts itself onto what is seen. In this sense, depending on the shift in focus, the perspectives change as well and, along with them, the profiles of what reaches us in the form of what is seen are also altered. It is thus that the move see/be seen takes place mediated by foci determined through the intentionality of the eye that, in turn, are brought along “the invisible thread” connecting intentionality to consciousness, which cognitively “process” these data.

Standing in the investigation room of the FBI task force, Doug lives two moments in tandem: the moment at which he is physically in the room, with the FBI agents, and the moment he is on the screen, kept real by the scientific-technological support. Therefore, time as lived by him and time as hyletically sensed are there in these pieces of equipment. The presence of people on the projected scenes manifests itself as recorded messages, images and voices. There is no overlapping of *nows*, that is, of present moments, but there is a stream of *nows* which is liable to be apprehended in its own continuity. Materiality made available as equipment expands modes of expression, memory, perception of what has occurred at the same time that offers potential ways of operationalization for lines of reasoning that are in the subjectivity of the subject and their respective expressions, which may be given in operationalization. These devices increase the complexity and speed up the investigation initiatives carried out by Doug and the task force, inasmuch as these are actions intentionally intertwined with thoughts and respective expressions of the subjects investigated.

From an educational standpoint, what is experienced in the film is the experience with cyberspace, in which the being plugged is intentionally driven to learn about mathematical questions that take place in this differentiated time-space. Bicudo & Rosa (2010) discussed this in terms of distance learning.

### **In Search for a Provisional Synthesis of this Article**

In this article, aspects of the complexity in which we live are underlined. These complexities are considered from the perspective of everyday life, since we are always, somehow, with media, keeping connected to whatever, for us, makes itself present. Going beyond the considerations formulated, we emphasize, in this briefed version of the article, background questions conceived in ontological and anthropological terms.

In ontological terms, reality is understood by us as covering the reality produced by resources of information science with the actions of people who intentionally operate this reality. From the standpoint of the human person, its own body is the ground zero, where he/she focuses aspects of the life-world and where he/she feels what reaches him/her, coming from this world. Based on what is exposed in this article, the hyletic layers that form the modes this person feels advance, constituting — in an intertwining with *other* characteristics of the totality of the subjective, like the dimensions of the biologic, psychic and spiritual — modes of feeling and perceiving, of reasoning and making a judgment. These modes, which reveal the subject's bio-psychic and spiritual frameworks, sustain answers, both to the queries sprung from the life-world, which is placed directly in the dimension of the other's physicality that is there, and to the queries born from the reality present on the computer screen, and given by other medias. In our opinion, in the scope of mathematical education, apart from the actions as those required by mathematical reasoning with the media (in logical terms, many times), apart from mathematical actions expressed by the own body, and apart from the situations intentionally driven to the learning of mathematical issues that take place in this differentiated time-space, a wide array of possibilities is open as regards research on education considering the theoretical framework sustained by philosophers, in particular, relative to phenomenological intentionality.

In this sense, we argue: then how do we constitute ourselves? How does mathematical education lived in the cyberspace take place? Apart from these, there are other relevant questions, according to our interpretation, which point to need to conduct investigations and define ethical and political stances, which we formulate thus: Where are we heading to? What changes are taking place in our neurological-psychic-spiritual system?

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## LE ROI DE FRANCE EST-IL CHAUVÉ?

MARINA-OLTEA PĂUNESCU<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT. Is the King of France Bald?** In 1892, Frege establishes the distinction between sense and denotation. Later on, in 1903, Russell deems the notion of *sense* as inconsistent. Indeed, if sense is defined as the donation of the object, what is the sense of *sense* in the absence of the object? Furthermore, how can we speak meaningfully (i.e. truly or falsely) of things that do not exist? The answer to these questions lies in the famous theory of descriptions which even though applicable to *denotative expressions in the natural languages*, it proposes an analysis which makes them liable to be logically significant. In my opinion, this is the main difficulty that an informed reader of Russell's text has to overcome. Russell consider that a statement like *Sherlock Holmes is a bachelor* is logically false, even though any reader of Sir Conan Doyle's stories knows it to be entirely true. Why is the logician's logic opposed to the logic of common sense?

**Keywords:** *sense, denotation, reference, definite description, proper noun*

**Résumé. Le roi de France est-il chauve ?** – Alors qu'en 1892 Frege pose la distinction du *sens* et de la *dénotation*, Russell (1903) considère que la notion de *sens* est inconsistante chez Frege. En effet, si le sens se définit comme le mode de donation de l'objet, quel est le sens du *sens* en l'absence de l'objet ? Plus encore, comment se fait-il qu'on puisse dire quelque chose de sensé (i.e. de vrai ou de faux) au sujet d'un objet inexistant ? La réponse à ces questions est constituée par la fameuse théorie des descriptions qui, alors même qu'elle s'applique aux *expressions dénotantes en langues naturelles*, en propose une analyse qui les rend aptes à signifier *logiquement*. C'est là, nous semble-t-il, la principale difficulté que doit dépasser le lecteur non averti au moment où il se penche sur le texte de Russell. Dans la conception de Russell, *Sherlock Holmes est célibataire* est une proposition logiquement fausse, tandis que pour tout lecteur de Sir Conan Doyle elle est, de toute évidence, vraie. Pourquoi la logique du logicien s'oppose-t-elle à la logique du bon sens commun ?

**Mots-clés:** *sens, référence, dénotation, description définie, nom propre*

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## 1. Argument

La question de la calvitie du roi de France a fait couler beaucoup d'encre (et amené plus d'un étudiant à s'arracher les cheveux de la tête). Du point de vue logique, un énoncé est soit vrai, soit faux, le tiers étant exclu. Puisque de toute évidence *L'actuel roi de France est chauve* ne peut être vrai, il passe généralement pour un énoncé faux. Mais s'il est faux, que dire de son contraire : *L'actuel roi de France n'est pas chauve* ? Selon le raisonnement de tout à l'heure, force est de constater qu'il est également faux (puisqu'il n'est pas vrai). Or, deux énoncés de sens contraire ne peuvent avoir des valeurs de vérité identiques. Sommes-nous confrontés à un paradoxe logique ?

Aux yeux de Russell, oui. Dans son ouvrage de 1903, *The Principles of Mathematics*, Russell présente une théorie de la dénotation essentiellement axée sur le rapport des concepts aux objets qu'ils dénotent. Ainsi, une expression dénotante possède un sens en vertu de la relation associant tel objet à tel concept. « Si nous disons *J'ai rencontré un homme*, l'expression *un homme* ne désigne pas le concept d'*homme*, mais l'homme réel dénoté par ce concept. Ce que j'ai rencontré en effet est un homme réel "avec un tailleur et un compte en banque" et non pas un concept "qui habite dans les limbes obscures des livres de logique et ne se promène pas en rue" »<sup>2</sup>.

Cette première théorie de la dénotation sera abandonnée deux ans plus tard, au moment de la parution de *On Denoting*. La justification de cet abandon réside dans les difficultés posées au logicien par l'analyse des énoncés contenant des expressions dénotantes qui ne dénotent rien (ainsi par exemple *l'actuel roi de France, Gandalf, la montagne dorée, le cercle carré*, etc.).

Pour le Russell du *On Denoting*, une phrase de forme sujet - prédicat devrait avoir comme objet l'entité dénotée par l'expression occupant la position sujet dans la phrase. Soit donc l'énoncé *L'actuel roi de France est chauve*. La présence de l'expression définie en position de sujet permet de croire que l'on parle de l'actuel roi de France. Or, argumente Russell, il n'y a pas d'entité qui soit actuellement roi de France, ce qui fait que *Le roi de France est chauve* se dit à propos de rien, autrement formulé, l'énoncé dont la forme grammaticale nous laisse croire qu'il possède une dénotation est à propos d'une entité non existante.

Mais dans ce cas, comment vérifier la façon dont le prédicat s'applique, ou non, au sujet, plus précisément à l'entité désignée par l'expression dénotante (alors que cette entité n'existe tout simplement pas) ? Comment peut-on dire quelque chose de sensé (*i.e.* de vrai ou de faux) au sujet de quelque chose d'inexistant ? Bref, comment parler de ce qui n'existe pas ?

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<sup>2</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, Cambridge University Press, 1903/1966, p. 56.

La réponse à ces questions est constituée par la fameuse théorie des descriptions qui, alors même qu'elle s'applique aux *expressions dénotantes en langues naturelles* (*l'actuel roi de France, Gandalf...*), en propose une analyse qui les rend aptes à signifier *logiquement*. La solution réside donc dans l'analyse logique des énoncés formulés en langue naturelle, analyse censée contrôler le pouvoir d'illusion généré par leur structure grammaticale apparente. C'est là, nous semble-t-il, la principale difficulté que doit dépasser le lecteur non averti au moment où il se penche sur le texte de Russell. Russell pense en logicien, non en linguiste. Ce qui pour le linguiste relève de la *logique du bon sens* est envisagé par Russell dans le contexte de la *logique formelle*, celle du *vrai* et du *faux*, du *sens* et du *non sens*.

Une autre difficulté est constituée par l'identification que Russell opère entre le *sens* et la *dénotation* d'une expression. La théorie des descriptions, appliquée à des énoncés formulés en langue naturelle, se heurte ainsi à un écueil qui n'est pas de nature logique, mais pragmatique.

Russell, lecteur de Frege, arrive à identifier le sens d'une expression à sa dénotation, réduction justifiée au nom du « sens de la réalité, vital en logique ». La démarche de Russell est une tentative de traduction logique du langage naturel, censée éliminer les ambiguïtés de la structure grammaticale apparente à travers la restitution de la forme logique des énoncés analysés. C'est ce qui lui permet de considérer que l'énoncé *Sherlock Holmes est célibataire*, par exemple, est logiquement faux, tandis que pour nous autres (linguistes, hommes de la rue, non logiciens...) il est, de toute évidence, vrai. En ce point, la logique du logicien s'oppose à la logique du bon sens commun, ce qui n'est pas sans poser un certain nombre de questions. La logique du logicien peut-elle se substituer à la logique du bon sens commun ? Une théorie logique, comme celle des descriptions définies, est-elle satisfaisante du point de vue pragmatique ? Notamment, donne-t-elle au locuteur les moyens nécessaires afin de référer, et à l'interlocuteur la possibilité non seulement de *comprendre*, mais surtout d'*identifier* le référent visé par le premier ?

## 2. Russell

Alors qu'en 1892 Frege avait posé la distinction du *sens* et de la *dénotation*<sup>3</sup>, Russell (1903) considère que la notion de *sens* est inconsistante chez Frege. Le

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<sup>3</sup> Les deux notions de *sens* et *dénotation* sont définies par Frege dans son article de 1892/1971, en réponse à la difficulté posée à la logique par l'analyse des énoncés d'identité. Frege a montré que certains énoncés d'identité, contrairement aux prédictions tirées de l'analyse logique, sont susceptibles de communiquer un contenu informatif à ceux qui les comprennent. Ainsi, (i) « Ion Barbu est Ion Barbu » (« a = a ») n'a pas le même sens que (ii) « Ion Barbu est Dan Barbilian » (« a = b »). Le premier est cognitivement vide, mais il n'en va pas de même du second. À celui qui ignore que Ion Barbu est Dan Barbilian, le second énoncé apprend sans doute quelque chose. Le premier énoncé est tautologique et vrai, tandis que le second, loin d'être faux ou pire encore, dénué de sens, est simultanément informatif et vrai.

point de départ de son argumentation réside dans une remarque de Frege, selon lequel contrairement aux langages logiques, les langues naturelles recèlent des expressions qui, tout en ayant un sens, ne possèdent pas nécessairement de dénotation *assignable*<sup>4</sup> (ainsi « le corps céleste le plus éloigné de la Terre », « le plus grand nombre naturel », « la suite qui converge le moins rapidement »). À remarquer que Frege ne pose pas le problème (ontologique) de l'inexistence de l'objet dénoté par le signe, mais soulève tout simplement le problème de l'impossibilité d'identifier, de façon systématique, une dénotation déterminée pour tous les signes.

Russell traduit la question de la dénotation non assignable dans les termes de l'inexistence de l'objet dénoté par le signe. Dans son opinion, si le sens se définit comme le mode de donation de l'objet, en l'absence de l'objet le sens est privé de toute dimension cognitive. En effet, qu'est-ce qu'un sens qui ne me met pas sur la voie d'aucun objet ? En d'autres termes, quel est le sens du *sens* en l'absence de l'objet ?

Dans l'opinion de Russell, le sens d'un signe, c'est l'objet qu'il dénote : je comprends un signe parce que je *sais* quelle entité il dénote. Mais en quoi ce *savoir* consiste-t-il ? Le problème de la dénotation est doublé chez Russell d'un problème épistémologique, *i.e.* relatif aux modalités dont on peut connaître un certain objet.

### 2.1. Référence et épistémologie

Russell distingue entre deux types de connaissance : (i) une CONNAISSANCE DIRECTE et (ii) une CONNAISSANCE INDIRECTE (par description).

(i) « Il y a (...) des mots – (...) tous ceux que l'enfant apprend en premier lieu (...) : les noms propres, les noms de classe relatifs à certaines espèces d'animaux familiers, les noms de couleurs, et ainsi de suite – ce sont ceux que j'appelle des "mots-objet" et ils composent le "langage-objet" (...) leur signification s'apprend (ou peut s'apprendre) face aux objets qu'ils désignent ou qui sont des illustrations de leur

<sup>4</sup> Confronté à l'aporie de la dénotation absente, Frege répondit par le concept de *présupposition* : l'existence d'une dénotation, logiquement nécessaire à la donation du sens, n'entraîne pas d'engagement ontologique, étant tout simplement *présupposée*. Dans les langues naturelles, *il va de soi* que l'emploi d'un nom (nom propre ou description définie) présuppose l'existence de ce qu'il dénote (position qui sera également celle de Searle (1996) : « tout ce dont on parle doit exister »).

« D'où tenons-nous qu'une expression a une dénotation ? Nous supposons une dénotation [...]. Ce peut être une erreur que de supposer une dénotation, et de telles erreurs se sont effectivement produites. Mais [...] il suffit de mettre en évidence le dessein tacitement impliqué dans la parole et la pensée, pour qu'il soit légitime de parler de la dénotation d'un signe, même s'il convient d'ajouter : au cas où une telle dénotation existe » (Gottlob Frege, « Sens et dénotation », *Écrits logiques et philosophiques*, Paris, Seuil, 1971, pp. 107-108). Au niveau de la proposition, la vérité de la présupposition est une condition logiquement nécessaire pour que *p* puisse se voir attribuer une valeur de vérité (V/F).

signification »<sup>5</sup>. « Vous ne pouvez expliquer, par exemple, le mot "rouge" qu'en montrant quelque chose de rouge »<sup>6</sup>.

Les mots-objet servent donc à indiquer la présence sensible de ce qu'ils désignent. « Dès que l'association entre le mot-objet et ce qu'il signifie a été établie, le mot est "compris" en l'absence de l'objet (...) »<sup>7</sup>.

Plus tard, Russell attribuera aux mots-objet le statut de noms propres logiques ou noms logiquement propres<sup>8</sup> (à ne pas confondre avec les noms propres grammaticaux). Les noms propres logiques sont des symboles simples, désignant directement un individu effectivement existant, donné *in praesentia* (je le vois) et, comme tel, immédiatement ou directement connaissable (angl. *be directly acquainted*). En termes linguistiques, les noms propres logiques coïncident avec des formes déictiques de nomination. Si l'on veut trouver dans les langues naturelles des noms propres logiques, les démonstratifs en seraient les meilleurs exemples (cf. *Ceci est rouge*), parce qu'ils servent à nous mettre directement en contact avec l'objet *sans lui attribuer de propriété caractéristique*, de sorte que nous avons une connaissance directe du référent.

(ii) Un objet qui n'est pas connu directement, *i.e.* un objet dont on ne peut faire l'expérience, sera connu par ses propriétés. Quelqu'un qui n'a pas rencontré Socrate, par exemple, pourra toujours s'y référer en faisant appel à une/des propriétés qui l'identifient de façon singulière : Socrate peut ainsi être conçu comme étant *le maître de Platon, le philosophe grec qui a bu la ciguë*, etc. Le sens du nom propre grammatical n'est donc plus l'objet qu'il dénote (comme dans la connaissance directe), mais la propriété à travers laquelle l'objet dénoté est connu<sup>9</sup>. Dans les termes de Russell, en l'absence de l'objet le nom propre fonctionne comme l'abréviation d'une description définie, du type *le tel-et-tel*.

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<sup>5</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Signification et vérité*, Paris, Flammarion, 1969, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*, p. 80.

<sup>8</sup> « Un nom [propre logique, n.n.] ne peut être appliqué qu'à un particulier que le locuteur connaît directement, parce qu'on ne peut nommer que ce que l'on connaît directement. Vous vous souvenez que quand Adam a nommé les bêtes, elles sont venues devant lui une par une, et qu'il en a eu une connaissance directe et les a nommées. Nous ne connaissons pas directement Socrate, et par conséquent nous ne pouvons le nommer. Quand nous utilisons le mot "Socrate", nous employons en réalité une description. On peut rendre le contenu de notre pensée par une expression telle que "le maître de Platon" ou "le philosophe qui a bu la ciguë" [...], mais nous n'employons certainement pas le nom comme un nom au sens propre du terme » (Bertrand Russell, « La philosophie de l'atomisme logique », in *Écrits de logique philosophique*, Paris, PUF, 1989, pp. 359-360).

<sup>9</sup> Pour Frege la description définie n'est pas le sens du nom propre, mais ce qui permet d'en identifier le référent.

La signification d'un nom est donc soit un objet (connaissance directe), soit une propriété (connaissance par description). La connaissance par description appartient au *savoir que* (« je sais QUE Socrate est un individu qui possède la propriété d'être *le-tel-et-tel* ») plutôt qu'au *savoir quel*<sup>10</sup> (possibilité d'identification *in praesentia* : « je sais QUI, ou bien QUEL est Socrate », je peux le montrer du doigt).

Dans le cas de la connaissance directe, l'objet n'est pas conçu comme une entité ayant des propriétés, puisqu'il s'agit d'une connaissance enracinée dans la perception sensorielle. Dans la connaissance indirecte, ce que je connais, c'est une/des propriété(s). Dans ce cas, l'entité dénotée est l'unique objet qui possède la propriété d'être *le tel-et-tel*, en d'autres termes, l'unique objet qui satisfait la description<sup>11</sup>.

Dans l'opinion de Russell donc, les expressions dénotantes sont soit des noms propres logiques (*ceci*), soit des descriptions définies, ces dernières pouvant être déguisées (*Socrate, Obama*), ou non déguisées (*la reine d'Angleterre, le chat du voisin*).

Tant que je n'ai pas l'expérience directe de l'individu désigné par le nom, l'expression va fonctionner comme une description, *i.e.* comme l'abréviation d'un ensemble de propriétés individualisantes, relatives à un objet dont je sais qu'il existe, *i.e.* qu'il est validé par l'ontologie<sup>12</sup> :

Socrate est *le tel-et-tel* (le maître de Platon).

Aristote est *le tel-et-tel* (le précepteur d'Alexandre).

## 2.2. Référence et ontologie

Toujours est-il que des expressions comme « le roi de France », « Pégase », « Gandalf », tout en ayant un sens, ne sont pas au sujet d'un objet ou d'un individu réellement existant. Pour Russell, qui identifie le sens d'une expression à l'objet qu'elle dénote, ces expressions sont à l'origine d'un certain nombre de paradoxes.

<sup>10</sup> L'opposition appartient à Stephen Neale, « La théorie des descriptions : passé et présent », in *Hermès*, n° 7/1990, p. 65.

<sup>11</sup> "I shall that an object is "know by description" when we know that it is "the-so-and-so", *i.e.* when we know that there is one object, and no more, having a certain property" (Russell, 1911 : 156, *apud* S. Neale, « La théorie... », art. cit., p. 85).

<sup>12</sup> Il est également possible d'imaginer une situation où un nom propre grammatical fonctionne, pour un locuteur A, comme un nom logiquement propre (le locuteur peut identifier l'individu dénoté par ce nom, il sait qui est Max, par exemple), tandis que pour un locuteur B, ce même nom fonctionne comme une description abrégée : il ne connaît Max qu'à travers une description définie : « le frère de Michel ». On peut présumer qu'au moment où B fera l'expérience du porteur du nom propre, le nom propre grammatical deviendra, à ses yeux, un nom logiquement propre : B va passer d'un *savoir que*, de nature descriptive, à un *savoir qui*, de nature identificatoire.

Apparemment, les deux propositions :

$p$  *L'actuelle reine d'Angleterre est sage, et*

$q$  *L'actuel roi de France est sage,*

formellement identiques, sont du même type : toutes les deux semblent dénoter une entité unique, connue par description. Mais tandis que l'expression *L'actuelle reine d'Angleterre* dénote un individu réel, ce qui permet de dire que  $p$  est vraie, tel n'est pas le cas de l'expression *L'actuel roi de France*.

Soit donc la proposition  $q$  : *L'actuel roi de France est chauve*<sup>13</sup>. Si je déploie la liste des objets constituant mon ontologie, je ne vais me heurter (au sens d'en faire l'expérience) à aucun individu ayant les propriétés d'être *l'actuel roi de France* et *chauve*. Ceci étant,  $q$  est fausse. Néanmoins, et selon cette même logique, la proposition suivante : *L'actuel roi de France n'est pas chauve* est également fausse<sup>14</sup>, ce qui semble porter atteinte à la loi du tiers exclu (en bonne logique binaire, dès deux propositions,  $q$  et  $\neg q$ , si l'une est vraie, l'autre est nécessairement fausse).

Un autre paradoxe engendré par le fonctionnement des expressions dénotantes en langue naturelle est constitué par leur association au verbe « exister », source soit de contradiction, soit de tautologie référentielle. Soit l'énoncé suivant :

*Pégase n'existe pas.*

Si l'on admet :

(i) que « Pégase » est le sujet logique de la proposition  $p$ , *i.e.* que  $p$  est à propos de Pégase, et

(ii) que le sens d'une expression, c'est l'objet qu'elle dénote,

il s'ensuit que  $p$  est nécessairement fausse<sup>15</sup>, car je ne peux nier l'existence d'une entité non existante. Nier l'existence d'une entité, c'est, d'une certaine façon, la lui reconnaître. Dans cette perspective, qui fut initialement celle de Russell, et Pégase, et l'actuel roi de France possèdent une certaine forme d'être<sup>16</sup> : même s'ils n'existent pas pour de bon, du moins ils subsistent.

<sup>13</sup> Exemple analysé par Russell (1905), trad. fr. in *Écrits de logique philosophique*, Paris, PUF, 1989, pp. 203-218.

<sup>14</sup> En effet, mon ontologie ne contient aucune entité qui possède les propriétés d'être *roi de France* et *non chauve*.

<sup>15</sup> Dans la perspective du bon sens, la fausseté de *Pégase n'existe pas* est difficilement assumable, d'autant plus que sa contradictoire : *Pégase existe*, est, elle, nécessairement fausse.

<sup>16</sup> « L'être est ce qui appartient à tout terme concevable, à tout objet de pensée possible, bref, à tout ce qui peut figurer dans une proposition, vraie ou fausse, et à toutes ces propositions elles-mêmes. L'être appartient à tout ce qui peut être compté. Si A est un terme quelconque pouvant être compté comme un, il est clair que A est quelque chose, et donc que A est. "A n'est pas" doit toujours être soit faux, soit dépourvu de sens. Car si A n'était rien, il ne pourrait pas être dit ne pas être ; "A n'est pas" implique qu'il y ait un terme A dont l'être est nié, et donc que A est. Donc, à moins que la phrase "A n'est pas" ne soit une suite de sons vides de sens, elle doit être fausse ; quoi que A puisse être, il est à coup sûr. Les

Je peux donc parler de ce qui n'existe pas en enrichissant l'ontologie, en admettant l'existence d'entités telles que le roi de France, une fourmi de 18 mètres, Pégase, les licornes, les centaures, la montagne dorée, le cercle carré, etc. Russell a d'abord opté pour ce premier type d'explication. Vingt ans plus tard, il l'abandonne au nom du sens de la réalité : « Le sens de la réalité est vital en logique, et quiconque s'amuse avec lui, en prétendant que *Hamlet* a une espèce de réalité, rend un mauvais service à la pensée »<sup>17</sup>.

### **2.3. Passage d'une version référentielle à une version existentielle des périphrases dénotantes**

Pour tous les gens de bon sens, *Pégase n'existe pas* est une proposition :

- (i) vraie,
- (ii) à propos de Pégase.

Russell, quant à lui, va démontrer que *p* est vraie, *mais à condition qu'elle ne soit pas à propos de Pégase*. En effet, si nous parcourons la liste de tous les objets qui constituent notre ontologie, nous n'allons trouver aucune entité spatio-temporellement localisée qui soit (ou qui ait été) « le-cheval-ailé-capturé-par-Bélérophon ». Ayant posé l'identité du sens et du référent, le sens d'un nom s'identifie, aux yeux du logicien, à l'objet dénoté par ce nom. Or, ni « Pégase », ni ce pour quoi ce nom propre grammatical est une description déguisée (*i.e.* « Le

nombres, les Dieux homériques, les relations, les chimères, les espaces à quatre dimensions ont tous de l'être ; car s'ils n'étaient pas des entités d'un certain genre, nous ne pourrions pas formuler des propositions à leur propos. L'être est donc un *attribut général* (c'est nous qui soulignons) de toute chose et mentionner quelque chose équivaut à montrer que cette chose est » (B. Russell, *The Principles...*, *op. cit.*, p. 449).

Cf. également le commentaire suivant de G. E. Moore : « J'ai déjà fait remarquer que dire qu'un centaure n'est pas réel semble équivaloir à dire qu'il n'y a pas une chose telle qu'un centaure. Même un philosophe doit insister sur le fait qu'il n'y a pas une telle chose, que c'est une pure fiction. Mais il y a un autre fait qui, à première vue, semble également clair. Je puis certes imaginer un centaure ; nous le pouvons tous. Et imaginer un centaure n'est certainement pas la même chose que de ne *rien* imaginer. Bien au contraire, puisque imaginer un centaure n'est certainement pas la même chose qu'imaginer un griffon. Or, si l'un et l'autre n'étaient rien, c'est-à-dire étaient de pures non entités, il n'y aurait, semble-t-il, aucune différence entre imaginer l'un et imaginer l'autre. Apparemment donc, un centaure n'est pas rien ; c'est quelque chose que j'imagine. Et, s'il est *quelque chose*, cela ne revient-il pas à dire qu'il y a une chose telle qu'un centaure –, que ce dernier est, ou a de l'être ? Il est certain que j'imagine *quelque chose* quand j'en imagine un, et il semble que ce qui est "quelque chose" doit être, c'est-à-dire qu'il y a une entité telle que ce que j'imagine. [...] Comment pouvons-nous alors maintenir notre première proposition, qui semblait certaine, à savoir qu'il n'y a *pas* une chose telle qu'un centaure ? » (George Edward Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, New York, Collier Books, 1953/1966, p. 274)

<sup>17</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Introduction à la philosophie mathématique*, Payot, Paris, 1928, p. 203.

cheval ailé capturé par Bélérophon ») ne dénotent aucune entité réellement existante. En l'absence de l'objet, « Pégase », tout comme l'expression « Le cheval ailé capturé par Bélérophon » sont dénuées de signification. Le sens d'une expression étant l'objet qu'elle dénote, une expression qui ne dénote rien est logiquement un non-sens. Le problème du logicien est donc le suivant : comment attribuer un sens (et donc implicitement une valeur de vérité) à une proposition contenant un non-sens ?

En deuxième lieu, étant donné que pour l'empirisme logique une proposition n'a de sens que si elle est soit vraie, soit fautive<sup>18</sup> *relativement à un individu réellement existant*, comment peut-on déclarer fautive une proposition qui n'est à propos de rien ?

La solution imaginée par Russell consiste à montrer qu'en dépit des apparences induites par leur structure grammaticale, ni *L'actuel roi de France est chauve*, ni *Pégase n'existe pas* ne sont, respectivement, à propos de l'actuel roi de France ou bien à propos de Pégase. Là où l'on croit parler de quelque chose qui se révèle ne pas exister, on est en proie à une illusion du langage naturel. Selon Russell, *le roi de France et Pégase* ne constituent pas d'authentiques expressions dénotantes. L'analyse logique montre que les propositions contenant ces expressions ne sont pas de forme sujet - prédicat, mais représentent un type particulier de propositions existentielles complexes, dont l'expression dénotante a complètement disparu.

L'argumentation de ce dernier point suppose *le passage d'une version référentielle à une version existentielle des périphrases dénotantes*. Il ne s'agit donc plus de vérifier qu'un individu a des propriétés, mais d'assumer qu'une propriété [concept, prédicat] a, ou non, des instances.

(1) *L'actuel roi de France est chauve* s'analyse désormais comme suit :

- clause d'existence → « Il existe un x »
- clause d'unicité → « et pas plus d'un x »
- propriété singularisante → « tel que x est le tel-et-tel (actuel roi de France et chauve) »

Du point de vue logique, *Le roi de France est chauve* signifie tout simplement que les propriétés *l'actuel roi de France* et *chauve* possèdent une instance<sup>19</sup> – ce qui est de toute évidence *faux*.

(2) *L'actuel roi de France n'est pas chauve* s'analyse à son tour comme suit :

- clause d'existence : « Il existe un x »
- clause d'unicité : « et pas plus d'un x »

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<sup>18</sup> Contrairement à Frege, Russell considère qu'une proposition qui n'est ni vraie, ni fautive, est un pur non-sens.

<sup>19</sup> Assertion d'unicité argumentable, selon Russell, à partir de la présence du prédéterminant défini.



- propriété singularisante : « tel que x est le tel-et-tel (actuel roi de France et non chauve) »

ou, en termes logiques : « Les propriétés *l'actuel roi de France et non chauve* » ont des instances », ce qui est tout aussi faux.

Selon Russell, le problème disparaît si l'on modifie la portée (angl. *scope*) de la négation. Dans *L'actuel roi de France n'est pas chauve*, nous avons affaire à une négation secondaire. Déplacer la négation en tête de la proposition permet de nier l'ensemble de la proposition :

(3) *Il est faux que l'actuel roi de France est chauve*,

ce qui se traduit logiquement par la conjonction des trois clauses suivantes :

- Il est faux qu'il existe un x,
- et pas plus d'un x,
- tel que x est le tel-et-tel (actuel roi de France et chauve).

ou, dans un langage plus intuitif : « Les propriétés *l'actuel roi de France et chauve* n'ont pas d'instances » (V), ce qui résout le paradoxe initial.

Selon cette même lecture, la proposition (4) :

(4) *Pégase n'existe pas*

signifie : « Il n'y a aucune instance de la propriété le tel-et-tel (cheval ailé capturé par Bélérophon) », ce qui a la valeur *vrai* ou, en d'autres termes : « La propriété *cheval ailé capturé par Bélérophon* n'a pas d'instances » (V)<sup>20</sup>.

On remarque que la traduction logique des périphrases dénotantes fait disparaître la description définie en introduisant à sa place une variable (x)<sup>21</sup>, dont

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<sup>20</sup> Dans *Histoire de mes idées philosophiques*, Russell écrit : « Le point essentiel de la théorie (des descriptions) était que, bien que "La montagne d'or" puisse être grammaticalement le sujet d'une proposition ayant un sens, une telle proposition, si elle est correctement analysée, n'a plus ce sujet. La proposition "La montagne d'or n'existe pas" devient : la fonction propositionnelle "(x est en or) et (x est une montagne) est fautive pour toute valeur de x" » (p. 105).

Telle est également la thèse défendue dans les *Principia Mathematica* : « Si le sujet grammatical d'une proposition peut être supposé ne pas exister (*sic !*) sans rendre la proposition dépourvue de sens, il est évident que le sujet grammatical n'est pas un nom propre et que, donc, dans tous les cas, la proposition doit pouvoir être analysée de telle manière que ce qui en était le sujet grammatical ait disparu. Donc, quand nous disons "le carré rond n'existe pas", nous pouvons lui substituer : "il est faux qu'il y ait un objet x qui soit à la fois rond et carré" » (*apud* Jean-François Malherbe, *Épistémologies anglo-saxonnes*, Presses Universitaires de Namur, 1981, pp. 38-39). Le poids de l'existence tombe donc sur le quantifieur (une, ou aucune entité), et non plus sur l'objet dénoté par le nom.

<sup>21</sup> Dans la conception de Russell, *Sherlock Holmes est célibataire* se lit donc de la façon suivante : « les propriétés *fameux détective privé, ami du docteur Watson et célibataire* possèdent une instance » (conformément à la théorie des descriptions définies, *Sherlock Holmes* est une façon plus économique de dire « *le fameux détective privé, ami du docteur Watson* ») – ce qui est logiquement faux, car un tel x n'existe réellement pas. Quant à sa négation, nous aurons, en fonction de sa portée (*i. étroite ou*

on vérifie si elle instancie ou non une certaine propriété. L'expression dénotante ayant disparu au cours de l'analyse, il ne nous faut plus *identifier une entité*, mais tout au plus *comprendre*<sup>22</sup> ce que serait un « cheval ailé » (ou un « actuel roi de France chauve »), s'il en existait un.

À son tour, le verbe « exister » ne fonctionne pas comme un prédicat d'objet, affirmant l'existence d'un individu, mais comme un quantifieur (relatif à l'idée de *quantité*) indiquant : (i) soit qu'une propriété possède des instances (en l'occurrence, une seule) ; je ne pense donc plus à un individu déterminé, qui manifeste la propriété ; tout ce que j'affirme, c'est que cette propriété est possiblement instanciée par un unique individu, quel qu'il soit), (ii) soit qu'elle n'en possède aucune. Dans ce cas, aucun individu ne manifeste la propriété, autrement formulé, la classe des entités supposées instancier la propriété est vide<sup>23</sup>.

L'existence est donc la propriété d'un *terme général* – le prédicat (ou, dans les termes de Frege, une propriété de propriété) et non d'un *terme singulier*. Dans les termes de Russell, « exister » ne s'applique pas à un objet, mais à un concept<sup>24</sup>. Mais dans ce cas, comment prédiquer l'existence à propos d'une entité singulière ?

*interne vs ii. large ou externe*) deux cas de figure : i. *Sherlock Holmes n'est pas célibataire*, ce qui signifie logiquement : « les propriétés *fameux détective privé, ami du docteur Watson et non célibataire* possèdent une instance ». Cette proposition étant également fausse, elle porte atteinte à la loi du tiers exclu, mais aussi et surtout à la logique du bon sens commun : tout le monde *sait* que *Sherlock Holmes est célibataire* ! Déplacer la négation en tête de l'énoncé permet de nier l'ensemble de la proposition exprimée : (ii) *Il est faux que Sherlock Holmes est célibataire*, ce qui se lit : « les propriétés *fameux détective privé, ami du docteur Watson et célibataire* n'ont pas d'instances » (dans la réalité), ce qui rend l'énoncé logiquement vrai.

<sup>22</sup> « "J'ai rencontré une licorne" ou "J'ai rencontré un serpent de mer" sont des assertions expressives si nous savons ce que pourraient être des licornes ou des serpents de mer, c'est-à-dire si nous connaissons la définition de ces monstres fabuleux. Ce n'est donc que ce que nous pouvons appeler le "concept" qui entre dans la proposition. Dans le cas de la "licorne", par exemple, il n'y a [...] quelque part, parmi les ombres, quelque chose d'irréel méritant le nom de licorne. Conséquemment, puisqu'il y a un sens (bien que faux) quand ont dit "J'ai rencontré une licorne", il est clair que cette proposition, correctement analysée, n'a pas comme constituant une licorne, mais le concept d'une licorne » (B. Russell, *Introduction...*, *op. cit.*, p. 201).

<sup>23</sup> Le quantifieur n'a donc aucune signification existentielle, il ne charrie aucun engagement ontologique en faveur de l'existence ou de l'inexistence d'une entité, mais nous communique strictement la quantité d'objets qui instancient la propriété P. En conclusion, malgré les apparences induites par la structure grammaticale des phrases formulées en langue naturelle, la dénotation des propositions existentielles complexes n'est pas constituée par un terme singulier, mais par un concept ou propriété.

<sup>24</sup> « Nous pouvons demander sans absurdité si Homère a existé, ce que nous ne pourrions pas faire si *Homère était un nom* (logiquement propre, n.n.). La proposition "le tel existe" a un sens, qu'elle soit vraie ou fausse ; mais si *a est "le tel"* (*a* étant un nom) la phrase "*a existe*" n'a pas de sens. On ne peut affirmer d'une façon précise que l'existence des descriptions (*i.e.* des propriétés, n.n.) (...). Aussi, lorsque nous demandons si Homère a existé, nous employons le mot "Homère" comme une description abrégée ; nous pouvons le remplacer par "l'auteur de l'Iliade et de l'Odysée" » (B. Russell, *Introduction...*, *op. cit.*, p. 213).

On accepte aujourd'hui deux conceptions de l'existence :

1. une conception prédicative, selon laquelle l'existence est un prédicat (donc la propriété d'un objet) : lorsqu'on dit *Barack Obama existe*, on attribue à l'individu Barack Obama la propriété d'exister, et d'exister réellement.

2. une conception non prédicative (en l'occurrence, celle retenue par Russell) : l'existence n'est plus une propriété instanciée par un individu, car « exister » n'est pas le prédicat (*i.e.*, en termes logiques, la propriété) d'un objet, mais le prédicat (donc la propriété) d'un concept (donc une propriété de second degré). L'énoncé *Barack Obama existe* n'attribue donc pas la propriété d'exister à Barack Obama (comme c'est le cas dans (1)). *Barack Obama existe* ne signifie rien d'autre que : *la propriété « le premier président de couleur des Etats-Unis » existe*. Or « exister » signifie, en langage logique, « avoir des instances ». *Barack Obama existe* signifie donc : *la propriété « le premier président de couleur des Etats-Unis »<sup>25</sup> est instanciée*. Contrairement à la conception exprimée sous (1) – *un individu a des propriétés*, en (2) *une propriété a des instances*.

En tant que logicien, Russell opte en faveur de la solution exprimée sous (2). En effet, si l'existence était une propriété instanciée par des *individus*, *i.e.* par des entités qui manifestent la propriété d'identité logique, elle serait un prédicat « trop universel », vrai de toute entité, y compris des entités fictionnelles<sup>26</sup>, puisque appartenant à tous les objets concevables. Il serait donc toujours contradictoire de refuser l'être à *quoi que ce soit*. Or, du point de vue logique, c'est là une erreur à éviter.

### 3. Pour une logique des langues naturelles

Les langues naturelles, quant à elles, acceptent un concept de *dénotation* plus étendu que celui des logiciens. Parmi l'ensemble des objets auxquels on peut référer<sup>27</sup>, il y a la classe des objets qui existent réellement, d'une part, et celle des objets imaginaires ou fictionnels, d'autre part.

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<sup>25</sup> Rappelons que dans la conception de Russell/Frege, les noms propres grammaticaux sont des descriptions déguisées (l'expression n'est pas du tout aléatoire : elle souligne le pouvoir d'illusion du langage naturel), *i.e.* des expressions complexes exprimant des propriétés. La solution proposée par Russell, *i.e.* l'analyse logique des énoncés formulés en langue naturelle, a justement le rôle de contrôler le pouvoir d'illusion généré par la structure grammaticale apparente. En effet, des usages incorrects du langage ordinaire peuvent susciter des usages (et implicitement des problèmes) philosophiques erronés. Une fois l'usage ordinaire bien compris – grâce à sa traduction dans un langage formel qui dénonce les pièges de la structure grammaticale apparente – bon nombre de questions philosophiques disparaissent, puisqu'elles sont, en fait, de fausses questions (ou plutôt de mauvaises questions).

<sup>26</sup> Les objets dépourvus d'existence réelle possèdent la propriété d'identité logique ( $a = a$ ) : Sherlock Holmes est identique à lui-même et différent du docteur Watson.

<sup>27</sup> On peut considérer que chez Frege et Russell, *dénotation* et *référence* sont des notions synonymes.

À ce propos, la position exprimée par Frege dans son article, « Sens et dénotation », remarquablement nuancée pour un logicien, recoupe celle des pragmaticiens. Contrairement à Russell, Frege semble distinguer entre un usage sérieux et un usage non sérieux du langage<sup>28</sup>. Ainsi le problème de la vérité/fausseté d'une proposition ne se pose que relativement à l'univers représenté par le monde réel. Tout comme on a des termes signifiants qui ne désignent rien, on peut avoir des propositions qui, bien qu'elles possèdent un sens, n'ont pas de dénotation. Tel est le cas des propositions appartenant aux textes de fiction. « La proposition *Ulysse fut déposé sur le sol d'Ithaque dans un profond sommeil* a évidemment un sens, mais il est douteux que le nom d'Ulysse [...] ait une dénotation ; à partir de quoi il est également douteux que la proposition entière en ait une »<sup>29</sup>.

Selon Frege, lorsque Homère affirme que *La patrie d'Ulysse est la Grèce*, cette proposition n'est ni vraie, ni fausse, parce que son but n'est pas d'asserter quelque chose sur le monde, et que donc le problème de son évaluation en termes de vrai/faux ne se pose tout simplement pas. Mais lorsque c'est nous qui affirmons que *La patrie d'Ulysse est l'Italie*, l'assertion est de toute évidence fausse, en tant même qu'elle se rapporte à l'univers représenté par le texte d'Homère.

Nous ne posons donc la question de la vérité ou de la fausseté d'une proposition qu'en tant qu'on lui attribue un *potentiel cognitif*. Or, ce dernier ne caractérise pas le discours de la fiction, dont on ne retient que le seul aspect esthétique (à quoi suffisent le sens des propositions et les représentations<sup>30</sup> qu'elles suscitent). Mais dès que nous importe la question de la vérité, on « [délaisse] le plaisir artistique pour l'examen scientifique »<sup>31</sup> et ce faisant, on passe de la *pensée* au *jugement*.

<sup>28</sup> « ... pour peu qu'[une] affirmation n'ait pas sa force habituelle, par exemple dans la bouche d'un acteur sur scène (mais aussi bien dans un poème ou un texte littéraire, n.n.), la proposition [...] ne contient jamais qu'une pensée » (G. Frege, « Sens..., art. cit., p. 110).

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>30</sup> Frege distingue, à côté du *sens* et de la *dénotation*, ce qu'il appelle la *représentation* du signe. Si le sens est objectif, en ce qu'il est partagé par plusieurs individus, la représentation, elle, est subjective et comme telle, variable d'un individu à l'autre. « Un peintre, un cavalier et un naturaliste lieront sans doute des représentations bien différentes au nom "Bucéphale" » (*id.*, p. 105). La représentation frégréenne serait ainsi proche de ce que les sémioticiens (dans la lignée de Peirce) appellent le *référént* ou l'*objet du signe* (opposé à la *dénotation* ou l'*objet réel* des logiciens). Contrairement à l'objet réel, le référént est une construction (discursive et culturelle). En effet, on peut douter que nos rapports aux objets soit des rapports immédiats, directs. Je ne connais jamais un objet en soi, en tant que pure objectualité. Contrairement au langage logique, le discours opère avec des représentations d'objets. Or, comme l'affirme Frege, ces dernières ne sont pas uniformes, mais hétérogènes, souvent dans le cas d'un seul et même individu. Je peux envisager la baleine comme étant simultanément un mammifère, un poisson, un monstre biblique, sans pour autant être contradictoire. Du point de vue logique cependant (dans la perspective du concept ou de la dénotation), la baleine ne peut être simultanément poisson et mammifère. Le fait qu'il mentionne la représentation pour l'abandonner ensuite montre que Frege est logicien, non sémioticien.

<sup>31</sup> G. Frege, « Sens..., art. cit., p. 109.

Si l'on peut donc admettre que les propositions *d'un texte de fiction* n'ont pas de valeur de vérité assignable<sup>32</sup>, tel n'est pas le cas des propositions formulées à propos d'entités fictionnelles, comme les suivantes :

(i) *La patrie d'Ulysse est l'Italie.*

(ii) *Sherlock Holmes est célibataire.*

Peut-on prétendre qu'elles ne possèdent aucune dénotation ? Que celui qui parle, parle à propos de rien ? D'autant plus qu'on n'a aucune difficulté à établir leur valeur de vérité. Ainsi, (i) serait de toute évidence faux, tandis que (ii) est vrai. Comme le suggère Frege, dans le cas des énoncés formulés en langue naturelle, il ne s'agit pas d'affirmer, mais de *présupposer* l'existence des entités dénotées<sup>33</sup>.

Si dans la logique standard (Russell, Frege), tout objet (toute dénotation) a le statut d'un objet réellement existant, la logique du discours<sup>34</sup> sépare le référent – qui est une pure construction discursive – de l'objet réel. Dans le discours, tout ce dont on parle est supposé exister. Ainsi donc les licornes, les sirènes, les centaures, Père Noël ou Sherlock Holmes existent (possèdent une existence épistémique, référentielle), même s'il n'y a réellement pas d'entités telles que les licornes, les sirènes, Père Noël ou Sherlock Holmes. Du point de vue discursif, *référer* n'est pas la propriété d'une phrase ou d'une expression, mais quelque chose à quoi on peut *utiliser* une phrase ou une expression. Dans les termes de Strawson<sup>35</sup>, ce ne sont pas les expressions qui réfèrent, mais les locuteurs qui, à travers l'usage d'une certaine expression, font référence à une entité particulière<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> V., à ce sujet, John Rogers Searle, « Le statut logique du discours de la fiction », in *Sens et expression. Études de théorie des actes de langage*, Paris, Minuit, 1982, pp. 101-120.

<sup>33</sup> Le fait que Russell place sur le même plan le contenu asserté, d'une part, et le présupposé d'existence, d'autre part, produit des énoncés à première vue déviants. Ainsi l'énoncé (i) : *Les sirènes existent* semble tautologique, vu qu'il affirme ce qu'il présuppose déjà. De la même façon, l'énoncé (ii) *Les sirènes n'existent pas* aboutit à une contradiction référentielle, vu qu'il affirme la non existence d'une classe d'entités dont l'existence est déjà présupposée par l'emploi substantif du mot « sirène ». Russell confond donc discours et ontologie, existence discursive et existence empirique. Dans *Les sirènes n'existent pas*, ce qui est nié, c'est tout simplement l'existence des sirènes en tant qu'êtres réels, leur existence en tant qu'objets du discours étant présupposée.

<sup>34</sup> La logique du discours est une logique libre d'assomptions existentielles au sens de la logique standard. Cf. cette remarque de Frege : « au signe il correspond un sens déterminé et au sens une dénotation déterminée » (« Sens... », art. cité, p. 106).

<sup>35</sup> Peter Frederick Strawson, « De l'acte de référence », *Études de logique et de linguistique*, Paris, Seuil, 1977.

<sup>36</sup> Strawson reproche donc à Russell d'avoir confondu *référer* et *signifier*. *Se référer* à quelque chose ou à quelqu'un est une *action*, tandis que *signifier* quelque chose n'en est pas une.

Dans la tradition ouverte par Strawson (1977), Searle (1996) définit la référence comme un acte à travers lequel le locuteur « extrait ou identifie un objet particulier dont il va pouvoir ensuite dire quelque chose, ou sur lequel il va pouvoir poser une question, etc. »<sup>37</sup>.

L'acte de référence est sous-tendu par trois axiomes :

1. L'axiome d'existence : « Tout ce à quoi on réfère doit exister »<sup>38</sup>.

2. L'axiome d'identité : « Si un prédicat est vrai pour un objet, il est vrai pour tout ce qui est identique à cet objet, indépendamment de l'expression utilisée pour référer à cet objet »<sup>39</sup>.

3. L'axiome d'identification : « Si un locuteur fait référence à un objet, alors il identifie ou peut toujours, si on lui demande, identifier cet objet pour l'auditeur, à l'exclusion de tous les autres objets »<sup>40</sup>.

Si le deuxième axiome reprend le problème logique de l'identité de l'objet de référence, le troisième pose, quant à lui, le problème essentiellement pragmatique de son identification. Russell évite ce problème à travers une opération de « dissolution » des expressions dénotantes, qui une fois réduites à leur forme logique (celle d'une proposition existentielle complexe), transforment le problème de l'identification d'une entité singulière (exigée par la présence de l'expression dénotante) dans un problème purement sémantique : comprendre le sens de la proposition ainsi obtenue (proposition d'où toute expression dénotante a disparu).

Or, comprendre n'est pas encore identifier. Certes, le problème de l'identification du référent n'est pas un problème logique, mais pragmatique<sup>41</sup>. Néanmoins, certains des exemples analysés par les logiciens justifient la prise en compte du point de vue pragmatique. *Sherlock Holmes*, *Pégase*, *l'actuel roi de France*, n'apparaissent justement pas dans un langage logique, mais essentiellement dans le contexte du

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<sup>37</sup> John Rogers Searle, *Les actes de langage. Essai de philosophie du langage*, Paris, Hermann, 1996, p. 126.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*, p. 121.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*, p. 124.

<sup>41</sup> Les reproches formulés par Strawson à l'adresse de la théorie russellienne des descriptions déplacent la discussion des conditions de vérité de la proposition vers les conditions de réussite de l'acte d'assertion. Russell se demande comment une proposition dont l'un des constituants n'a pas de sens peut être vraie ou fausse ; la question de Strawson est de savoir dans quelles conditions l'usage d'une phrase par un locuteur revient à faire une assertion vraie ou fausse à propos d'une entité singulière. Si le discours quotidien est formé d'*énoncés*, résultats des actes d'énonciation, cela n'implique aucunement qu'il y ait une erreur dans la façon dont Russell entend poser la question du sens des *propositions*.

discours de la fiction, de la mythologie ou tout simplement du discours quotidien (voir, à ce propos, le statut déictique, donc fortement dépendant du contexte, de l'expression *l'actuel roi de France*).

Devant quelqu'un qui invoquerait « sérieusement » la question de la calvitie du roi de France, on ne répondrait pas par une démonstration logique, mais on lui ferait remarquer que la question ne se pose tout simplement pas, la France n'étant pas une monarchie. À la question de savoir comment on peut parler de ce qui n'existe pas, du point de vue discursif la réponse est étonnamment simple : par erreur. Le locuteur a cru se référer au roi de France, mais puisqu'une telle entité n'existe pas, il a échoué à se référer à qui que ce soit. Ce cas est à distinguer des situations où l'on se réfère incorrectement à une chose en pensant qu'elle est telle et telle sans pour autant échouer dans notre tentative de nous référer précisément à cette chose (même en lui attribuant des propriétés descriptives qu'elle ne possède pas en fait). Ainsi, je peux me référer à quelqu'un en disant « le vieil homme aux cheveux blancs » même s'il s'avère que l'homme en question n'est pas vieux, mais blanc prématurément.

Ces réponses valent pour autant qu'on se situe sur le terrain des langues naturelles, dont les énoncés ne font sens que relativement au contexte de leur usage. Or, contrairement aux langues naturelles, les langages formalisés, comme celui de la logique, sont dépourvus de dimension pragmatique.

Enfin, si le logicien travaille avec des *concepts*, les sujets parlants se réfèrent, eux, à des *individus*, qui ne sont pas seulement des entités putatives, connaissables par description, mais le plus souvent des entités existantes (relativement à un univers de référence), et, comme telles, identifiables.

Or, l'identification ne réside pas toujours dans l'emploi ponctuel d'une expression référentielle (description définie<sup>42</sup> ou nom propre), mais dans le processus

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<sup>42</sup> Dans les romans policiers, par exemple, les descriptions constituent des préliminaires utiles à l'identification du référent, mais elles ne possèdent pas de fonction identifiante. « Contrairement aux situations théoriques envisagées par Frege/Russell, les protagonistes d'un dialogue référentiel n'ont aucune connaissance préalable du référent (ni directe, ni indirecte). Il ne s'agit d'aucun personnage historiquement connu (Aristote, Romulus ou Cicéron), auquel on puisse référer au moyen des descriptions faisant partie de notre connaissance du monde. Le clou de l'énigme est justement de pouvoir identifier, à partir des descriptions résultant d'une investigation empirique du monde, *ce qui* est en question, i.e. *ce* à propos de quoi les questions sont formulées, et qui constitue l'objectif même de l'enquête référentielle. En d'autres mots, l'individu jusque-là décrit demeure entièrement putatif jusqu'au moment de son identification formelle : le criminel présumé, dont on *croit* qu'il est *le tel-et-tel*, doit être identifié en tant que personne *réelle*, correspondant au profil progressivement construit par Holmes et le docteur Watson » (Marina-Oltea Păunescu, « *Le Mystère du Val Boscombe : un exemple d'énigme référentielle* », in A. Cosăceanu, L. Diaconu (éds), *La Magie des mots. Mélanges offerts à Alexandra Cuniță*, București, EUB, 2012, p. 93).

dialogique à travers lequel l'auditeur parvient à une référence identifiante à travers un jeu réglé de questions - réponses. Plus qu'un acte du locuteur, une référence réussie (ou, dans les termes de Searle, une *référence complète*) est un « procès dynamique d'inter-référence mené conjointement par les interlocuteurs »<sup>43</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion

La théorie des descriptions éclaire-t-elle le problème de la calvitie du roi de France ? Oui, dans la perspective du logicien, peu, ou de façon très peu satisfaisante, si l'on se place du côté de l'usage commun de la langue. La logique du logicien ne coïncide pas avec la logique du discours ordinaire. Strawson finit d'ailleurs son article, « De l'acte de référence », par les mots suivants : « Ni les règles d'Aristote ni celles de Russell ne fournissent la logique exacte de quelque expression que ce soit de la langue ordinaire ; en effet, la langue ordinaire n'a pas de logique exacte »<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Denis Vernant, « La confrontation des croyances », *Archives de philosophie du droit*, n° 29/1984, p. 147. V. également Francis Jacques, *L'espace logique de l'interlocution*, Paris, PUF, 1985.

<sup>44</sup> P. F. Strawson, « De l'acte... », art. cit., p. 38.



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## SYLLOGISTIC REASONING FROM PETRUS HISPANUS TO MODERN CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

PAULA POMPILIA TOMI<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** This paper is going to present the syllogistic reasoning beginning with the Middle Ages and comparing the traditional type of this kind of reasoning with some modern conceptualizations (Hodges and Makinson). In this paper is emphasized the view of Petrus Hispanus, a Middle Age philosopher who based his point on Aristotle's and Boethius' logic. There is a difference between their presentations of this reasoning. The conceptual difference between Aristotle's and the traditional one is going to be pointed. The problem of the fourth figure is also going to be considered. The conclusion of this analysis is going to underline the evolution and continuity of the syllogistic reasoning.

**Keywords:** *syllogism, fourth figure, proposition, Summulae Logicales, reasoning, traditional logic, modern logic*

In traditional logic syllogism is a form of deductive reasoning which has two premises and a conclusion, it also has only three terms, each of them occurs twice and the middle one does not appear in the conclusion. Aristotle defines this kind of reasoning as "a discourse in which, certain things having been supposed, something different from the things supposed results of necessity because these things are so."<sup>2</sup> This definition is too large because it removes the differences between syllogism and other kinds of deductive reasoning.<sup>3</sup> Some additions are made to the first definition: syllogistic reasoning is formed of two premises which are linked by a middle term.

When Aristotle decides which propositions can be premises he denies this right to singular proposition, even if he uses them as examples through his presentation. In traditional logic singular proposition can be understood as universal ones. Affirming or denying something about the object of the singular propositions, the predicate refers to the whole extension of the subject. In Aristotle's logic are

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<sup>2</sup> Aristotel, *Organon*, trans. Mircea Florian, București: Editura IRI, 1997, *Analitica primă*, I, 1, 24b

<sup>3</sup> Rusinoff apud Baškent, „Hypothetical Syllogism in Aristotle and Boethius”, 11 sept. 2008, (<http://canbaskent.net/logic/early/syllogism.pdf>), pp. 1

underlined propositions which have general terms because only this kind of terms are interchangeable and Aristotle wanted to have this propriety for all of the terms used in a syllogism. Singular terms can only be subjects in a categorical proposition.

In Aristotelian logic things are divided in three classes<sup>4</sup>: the first one represents things that cannot be predicate about anything, as proper names, but other can be predicate about these ones, the second class is composed of things about that nothing can be predicate, but that can be predicate about others and the last one contains things that can be both predicates and subjects.

Łukasiewicz denied that things can be predicate about other things, he thought that only predicate as a part of a proposition, as a word with a meaning can have this role. In this case the classification is not about things, it is about terms. Łukasiewicz made a critical analysis for this classification. First of all he considered that it is wrong to say that singular terms cannot be predicate, because even Aristotle used examples with this kind of terms as predicates, for example “That white object is Socrates” or “The one that is coming is Callias” and said about those propositions that represent only an opinion, they are true only contingent.<sup>5</sup> There are examples of propositions which have a singular term as predicate and are not true in a contingent way, for example a tautology which expresses the identity principle and have the same term as subject and predicate – Socrates is Socrates – or use different linguistic expressions to express the same object – Shakespeare is the one that wrote Hamlet.

Even if we accept that Aristotle can be confuted in this part of his doctrine, the need to have interchangeable terms remains. In each figure there is a term which is both a subject and a predicate: in the first figure the middle term, in the second the major one and in the third one the minor. Łukasiewicz saw in this need of interchangeability the only strong reason why Aristotle could exclude the singular terms among the ones that can form a categorical proposition as a premise for the syllogism.<sup>6</sup>

There are some differences between the traditional syllogism and the Aristotelian one. The traditional syllogism represents a deductive reasoning which is formed of three propositions, and the Aristotelian one is a proposition based on an implication, it has the “if – then” form in which the antecedent is the conjunction of the premises, and the consequent is the conclusion.<sup>7</sup> The traditional syllogism can

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<sup>4</sup> Łukasiewicz, *Aristotle's Syllogistic from the Standpoint of Modern Formal Logic*, 2nd ed, London: Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 5

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 6

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 7

<sup>7</sup> Patzig, *Silogistica aristotelică*, trans. Mircea Constantinescu, Niels Offenberger, București: Editura Științifică, 1970 pp. 23

be understood as a rule of reasoning which affirms that based on two propositions of a certain type, a third one – the conclusion – can be obtained using some certain rules.

In Aristotle's language, propositions are formulated differently. Instead of using a copula, Aristotle used expressions as "to belong" or "to be contained about", in this way the predicate is the one which almost all the time is the first one. Therefore, the four categorical propositions have a different linguistic form in traditional logic and in Aristotelian one. In traditional logic, a universal affirmative proposition is "S is P" and in Aristotle's language it becomes "A belongs to all/every B". The problem which rises is why did Aristotle use those expressions. Alexander of Afrodisia founded three possible answers:

- (1) the conclusion is more obvious;
- (2) the role of each term is clearer;
- (3) the predicate, which is more general by its nature, is the first one<sup>8</sup>.

The first point can be applied to the first figure, because it would maintain the evidence of the conclusion, the other two points underline the fact that the predicate would be in nominative and the subject in dative or genitive.

Petrus Hispanus defines syllogism as an *oratio*, a discourse, the definition is alike with the Aristotelian one: "a syllogism is a discourse in which, once some things have been posited, something else necessarily happens through what have been posited"<sup>9</sup>. The example offered by Petrus is:

"Every animal is a substance  
Every man is an animal  
So, every man is a substance."<sup>10</sup>

Petrus adds that every syllogism is composed of three terms and two propositions: the major one which has the major term (P) and the minor one which has the minor term (S). Because two proposition cannot be composed of three terms, one of them must occur twice, that is the middle (M). The terminology is borrowed from Aristotle, who used it based on the first figure. The middle is the term which has the middle position, more exactly, it is contained by the major and it contains the minor. Aristotle considered that if A is stated about all B and B about all C, it is required that A to be stated about all C, the same is in the case of the negative propositions. In traditional logic those terms are defined based on their

<sup>8</sup> Alexander of Afrodisia apud. Patzig, *op.cit.*, pp. 33

<sup>9</sup> Petrus Hispanus, *Tractatus*, Introduction by L.M.De Rijk, Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp. B.V., 1972, pp. 43

<sup>10</sup> Omne animal est substantia. Omnis homo est animal. Ergo omnis homo est substantia. (*Ibidem*, pp. 43)

position in the conclusion, but in Aristotle's and Petrus' examples of the syllogism often do not even have conclusion, therefore, the definition of the minor and major is independent of their role in conclusion. It can be said that their position in conclusion is a convention, in the first figure this positioning is the base for the perfect modes, but in the other figures it is an arbitrary decision.<sup>11</sup>

Hence, the major is almost all the time the largest extensionally, the next one is the middle term and the species, represented by the minor term. There are some exceptions, for example if *salamander* is taken as major, *animal* as minor and *mammal* as the middle.<sup>12</sup>

The figure consists in the positioning the three terms based on their role as subject and predicate. Petrus, as Aristotle, considered that this positioning can be made in three ways. Every figure is defined based on the position of the middle, therefore<sup>13</sup>: the first figure is when the term which is subject in the first proposition is predicate in the second one, the second figure is when the same term is predicate in both premises and the third figure is when the same term is subject in both premises.

In traditional logic are four figures, even if it is not expressed directly by Aristotle, as Petrus, offered some examples of valid syllogism of the fourth figure, but there are considered indirect modes of the first figure, which can be reducible at those valid modes of the first figure. The fourth figure was added to the other ones by Aristotle's students of Peripatetic School. This idea is expressed in Dumitriu and Kneale and Kneale. It seems that Theoprastus was the first one who added the five valid modes of the fourth figure.<sup>14</sup>

Rose analyses the problem of the fourth figure and he concludes that the manner of representation of those figures represents the base for the number of the figures discovered. The linear manner of representation used by Aristotle made the representation of the fourth figure impossible. Often Aristotle represents the categorical propositions using a form as AB and does not indicate the quality, nor the quantity or the function of the terms. In Aristotelian language AB means that A is the predicate and B the subject.<sup>15</sup>

In the first figure the middle term has the middle position, the major is predicate about the middle and the middle is predicate about the minor, this figure can be symbolised as PMS, where PM represents the major premise, MS is the minor one and PS is the conclusion. In the second figure the middle is predicate about both other terms, this case could be represented in the linear manner by MPS where MP

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<sup>11</sup> Patzig, *op. cit.*, pp. 152

<sup>12</sup> Kneale and Kneale, *Dezvoltarea logicii*, trad. Cornel Popa, Cluj – Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1974, pp. 79

<sup>13</sup> Petrus Hispanus, *op.cit.*, pp. 44

<sup>14</sup> Baškent, *op.cit.*, pp. 3

<sup>15</sup> Rose, „Aristotle's Syllogistic and the Fourth Figure”, in *Mind*, vol. 74, No. 295 (Jul., 1965), pp. 382-383

and MS are the premises and PS is the conclusion. The last figure has the middle term as subject in both premises, in this case it could be represented as PSM, where PM and SM are the premises and PS is the conclusion. This linear manner of representation for syllogistic figures is alike with the manner of representation in antique manuscripts.<sup>16</sup>

Rose proves that the number of possible figures is based on the way those figures are represented. If it is used the Aristotelian manner there are only three figures, the fourth is impossible to be pictured using a linear manner. A syllogism is possible only when a term is a link for the other two, this can be made in three ways: stating A about C and C about B, or C about both (A and B) or both about C.<sup>17</sup> Those are the three possible figures. The fourth one where M is predicated about P and is predicated by S it is impossible to represent linear, because it would need a premise as MP and another one as SM. If Petrus Hispanus considers the valid syllogisms of the fourth figure as indirect modes of the first ones, Rose considers that Aristotle does not deny the validity of those modes, or the fact that they are realised using a syllogistic form, but they are not syllogisms per se (in a strict Aristotelian manner) because they have to be formulated using one of the figures accepted by Aristotle.<sup>18</sup>

Aristotle considers that a syllogism that has a conclusion which can be converted, can also have as conclusion the converse, because of this all valid modes of the fourth figure can be considered modes of the first figure. Patzig thinks that Aristotle defines the three terms of the first figure by their extension and after this figure, he offers definitions based on their function in the premises. For a syllogism to be perfect it must have the major as predicate of the conclusion, this case is generalised for all the figures, but because of this there are some valid syllogism denied.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, a definition for the fourth figure using the same concepts as Aristotle used assumes a major reorganization of the definitions of the Aristotelian system. In this case the modes of the fourth figure are handled as modes of the first one even if the relations between the terms do not satisfy their definitions of the first figure. The fact that there were added five modes to the first figure destroyed the homogeneity of the system, because the other two figures were not completed. Patzig considers that the absence of the fourth figure is not a mistake and does not reflect that Aristotle did not believe that there exist some valid modes in another form than the three ones already known, the fourth figure is missing in Aristotelian doctrine because it could not be defined in his system.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Kneale, *op.cit.*, pp. 83

<sup>17</sup> Aristotel, *op.cit.*, I, 23, 41 a (where A / P, B / S și C / M)

<sup>18</sup> Rose, *op.cit.*, pp. 386

<sup>19</sup> Patzig, *op.cit.*, pp. 181

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 182

Therefore, there are different opinions about the fourth figure which is missing not only in Aristotle's work, but in Petrus' too. Starting with the idea that the valid modes of the fourth figure are indirect ones of the first and can be reduced of this one by a simple conversion of the conclusion, and continuing with the idea that this figure cannot be represented in a linear manner, nor defined in Aristotelian system.

Returning to Petrus Hispanus, the mode represents the ordering of the premises by quantity and quality, in fact, it means that there are inserted the four types of categorical proposition in the structure of the figures. His presentation continues with the general rules of syllogism. On the base of these rules the valid and invalid syllogisms can be determined which syllogism is valid or not. There are some differences between those rules and the ones from traditional logic. First of all, the rule that assumes that from a universal and a particular premise, the conclusion must be particular, is clearer in Petrus' *Tractatus*, because it underlines that from two universal premises the conclusion can also be particular, in his words: "if a premise is particular, the conclusion must be particular, but not the converse."<sup>21</sup>

Aristotle accepts particular conclusions from universal premises, but he introduces a restriction, he compels that the terms used to form the syllogism cannot be exhausted, they must have at least one element in their extension, because if not the conclusion can be false even the premises are true. Universal propositions do not have existential import, therefore the conclusion, which has one, is not supported by the premises without Aristotle's requirement. On the other hand Boole does not accept a particular conclusion from universal premises in a deductive way. Any particular proposition supports the existence of the subject's class, if we affirm that *Some people have blond hair* there must exist at least one person. The general propositions do not imply the existence of the subject's class. If we take, for example, the proposition *All humans are mortal* we only affirm that if there is something as a human, it must be mortal. Therefore, particular propositions have the existential import, and the universal ones do not, and if we have universal premises and a particular conclusion, the reasoning may be valid but not deductive. If a reasoning is deductive, the conclusion cannot include something that premises do not already stipulate. The demonstration can be made using Venn diagrams or predicate logic. For example, in predicate logic the mode aai-3 can be written:

$$\begin{aligned} &\forall x (Mx \supset Px) \\ &\forall x (Mx \supset Sx) \\ &\therefore \exists x (Sx \wedge Px) \end{aligned}$$

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<sup>21</sup> „si aliqua premissarum est particularis, conclusio debet esse particularis, et non e converso.” (Petrus Hispanus, *op.cit.*, pp. 45)

In this case, the conclusion cannot be demonstrated if another assumption is not introduced:  $\exists x (Sx)$ .

The rule that assumes that from two affirmative premises, the conclusion must be affirmative is omitted, but this is common in traditional logic too. The rules about distribution are also omitted.

In Aristotelian syllogistic the concept of distribution does not appear, nor in Petrus' even if Petrus Hispanus defines the concept, but not in the part where he details syllogism. In traditional logic a term is distributed if it is taken/considered in its whole sphere. The definition of this concept given by Petrus in his last tractate (*De distributionibus*) in *Summulae Logicales* is alike with the one from traditional logic:

"Distribution is the multiplication of a common term effected by a universal marker. In ,every man', the term ,man' is distributed or diffused for any of its inferiors<sup>22</sup> by the marker ,every', and that is the way multiplication of a common term occurs. I say ,of a common term' because a singular term cannot be distributed. That is why ,every Socrates', ,every Plato' and their like are incongruous."<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, if the proposition says something about every instance of the term,<sup>24</sup> it is distributed. In categorical proposition, the subject is distributed in universal ones and the predicate in negative. Between syllogistic rules there are two about distribution of terms:

Rule 1: The middle term must be distributed in at least one premise.

Rule 2: Terms (S, P) cannot be distributed in conclusion unless they are distributed in premises.

Makinson considers that even if the traditional formulation for this concept is vague, it is coherent and meaningful. There is a syntactic approach and a theoretic deduction one. For the syntactic one the categorical proposition are transformed based on the language of predicate logic<sup>25</sup>:

All P are Q becomes  $\forall x (Px \supset \exists y (Qy \wedge x = y))$   
 Some P are Q becomes  $\exists x (Px \wedge \exists y (Qy \wedge x = y))$   
 Some P are not Q becomes  $\exists x (Px \wedge \forall y (Qy \supset x \neq y))$   
 No P are Q becomes  $\forall x (Px \supset \forall y (Qy \supset x \neq y))$

<sup>22</sup> Subset of the term

<sup>23</sup> Hispanus, *op.cit.*, pp. 209 – „Distributio est multiplicatio termini communis per signum universale facta. Ut cum dicitur *'omnis homo'*, iste terminus *'homo'* distribuitur sive confunditur pro quolibet suo inferiori per hoc signum *'omnis'*; et/sic est ibi multiplication terminus communis. Dico autem *'termini communis'*, quia terminus singularis non potest distribui. Unde iste sunt incongrue: *'omnis Sortes'*, *'omnis Plato'*, et sic de aliis."

<sup>24</sup> Makinson, „Remarks on the Concept of Distribution in Traditional Logic", in *Noûs*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Feb. 1969), pp. 103

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 104



In this case a term is distributed if in the translation of the proposition its variable has the universal quantifier; if it has an existential one, the term is not distributed. The main idea of the traditional concept is maintained and it becomes clearer.

In the syntactic approach the concept of distribution has some restrictions/limitations. In the traditional approach the concept was related to the proposition's logical capacity but not to its linguistic form which it expresses. Syntactical approach offers an exact meaning for this concept for the categorical propositions, but terms that appear in more complex propositions are harder to analyse using this approach. Therefore, the concept can hardly pass the limits of traditional logic.<sup>26</sup>

The traditional concept presumes that a term is distributed if every time the proposition affirms or denies something about that term, also made it about every term included in the first one. Embracing Russell's form to represent categorical propositions we have<sup>27</sup>:

All P are Q becomes  $\forall x (Px \supset Qx)$   
 Some P are Q becomes  $\exists x (Px \wedge Qx)$   
 Some P are not Q becomes  $\exists x (Px \wedge \neg Qx)$   
 No P is Q becomes  $\forall x (Px \supset \neg Qx)$

In this case a term  $\tau$  is distributed if and only if:

$\alpha - \forall x (\tau'x \supset \tau x) \supset \alpha [\tau/\tau']$  where  $\tau'$  is a new letter for a predicate that does not occur in  $\alpha$  yet and expression  $\alpha [\tau/\tau']$  is obtained by substituting  $\tau$  with  $\tau'$  in  $\alpha$ .<sup>28</sup> This approach respects the initial definition; the predicate is still distributed in negatives and the subject in universals.

This theoretical deduction approach makes possible the generalization of the concept to more complex propositions. The first approach is syntactical, therefore to determine if a term is distributed or not, the quantifiers matter. The second one is semantic. To determine if  $\tau$  is distributed in a proposition it must be checked if something is implied by something, and this leads to a circularity: it cannot be checked if a reasoning is valid without knowing which terms are distributed and on the other hand it cannot be analysed the distribution of the terms without knowing what propositions are implied. Makinson gives an example for Barbara in which case we cannot find if the subject is distributed without knowing if the mode is valid.<sup>29</sup> Hodges defines the concept of distributed term so: a term X is said to be distributed in an atomic sentence  $\phi$  of  $S^{30}$  if X occurs in  $\phi$  and there is a first – order sentence  $\phi'$  which is

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 105

<sup>27</sup> Russell apud Makinson, *op.cit.*, pp. 105

<sup>28</sup> Makinson, *op.cit.*, pp. 105

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 106

<sup>30</sup> S is the language of the syllogism where the four categorical propositions are transformed using the language of first order logic.

equivalent to  $\phi$ , in which  $X$  does not occur positively; likewise  $X$  is said to be undistributed in  $\phi$ . For example, if the proposition  $A(P,Q)$  is taken, this one is equivalent<sup>31</sup> with:

$$\forall x (\neg Px \vee Qx)^{32}$$

Therefore,  $P$  is distributed and  $Q$  undistributed in a universal affirmative proposition.

Hodges considers that if the distribution concept is identified with the presence of the universal quantifier, there are some cases of distributed terms which cannot be found using this method, for example the predicate in a particular negative proposition.

The authors from Port – Royal consider that what  $\phi$  states about  $X$  it states about  $X$ 's subsets, and because of this  $X$  is distributed in  $E(X, Y)$  and in  $O(X, Y)$  also, based on the fact that if the gender is denied, so are the species.<sup>33</sup> It is not enough that the undistributed term to be defined using the negation of the distributed one, as the authors of Port – Royal did, it must be introduced a new definition for the second term. Through introduction of the terms *downward monotone* and *upward monotone* it can be concluded that a term is distributed if it is downward monotone and undistributed if it is upward monotone. Hodges offers the following definitions for those terms<sup>34</sup>:

**Definition 1:** a term  $X$  in a formula  $\phi$  is downward monotone in  $\phi$  if for every structure  $M$  in which  $\phi$  is true,  $\phi$  is also true in  $N$  which differs of  $M$  only in one interpretation, more accurate,  $X^N$  is a proper subset of  $X^M$ .

**Definition 2:** A term  $X$  is upward monotone in  $\phi$  if for every structure  $M$  in which  $\phi$  is true,  $\phi$  is also true in  $N$  which differs from  $M$  only in one interpretation, more accurate,  $X^M$  is a proper subset of  $X^N$ .

Therefore, even if are used different approaches of redefining the concept of distribution, Makinson considers that using the theoretical deduction approach the distribution of a term is based on the logical force of the proposition not on its formula, in this case the concept is not syntactic. Even if the meaning of the concept passes beyond the limits of traditional logic, its utility is limited to the reasoning of this kind of logic.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Using Russell's method of transformation already presented above.

<sup>32</sup> Hodges, „The Laws of Distribution for Syllogisms”, in Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic, vol. 39, no. 2 (spring 1998), pp. 224

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 226

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 226-227

<sup>35</sup> Makinson, *op.cit.*, pp. 108

In conclusion, the syllogistic reasoning in its traditional form is different of the Aristotle's syllogism. Petrus Hispanus is placed as a middle between those two perspectives. He follows Aristotelian conception but based on Boethius's translation, so a modified one. Boethius kept Aristotle's definitions and concepts, but changed his language, especially his natural one. Petrus, as Boethius, relinquishes the strict formulation of the categorical propositions from Aristotle's language and uses the traditional logic's formulation. The number of the figures, the valid modes and rules follow the Aristotelian doctrine. In this case, we may conclude that through Petrus' work, which represented one of the most well-known logic textbooks of Middle Ages, is realised one of the first transitions to what we call today traditional syllogism.

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## THE REGIME OF NETWORK-COMUNICATION AND THE PROBLEM OF EXPRESSION

SAVA ALEXANDRU-VASILE<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** The major debate within A.I. theory at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, on whether or not developing a computer with self-consciousness was feasible, was interjected by the philosopher John Searle, who aimed to abolish the idea entirely. His attack, making the case from a typical Cartesian perspective that aims to maintain a separated realm of subjective intentionality, falls however short, as he himself already accepts the underlying communicational paradigm of the information age, which renders obsolete his separation between an intentional subject and his outer linguistic expressions. This debate itself reveals the paradigm shift within 20<sup>th</sup> century communication theory, in which the gradual destabilization of unitary human subjectivity gives way to the network paradigm of communication, in which the intentional transfer of information is replaced by algorithmic rules of network relations, and the power-structure of social relations. In the following paper I will attempt to trace this shift and its potential breaking points towards a new paradigm, using Deleuzian theory to analyse the current state of communication.

**Keywords:** *communication, Deleuze, delirium, expression, network.*

### The Diagrams of Informatics – Language as a Network of Algorithms

Anglo-Saxon philosophy accidentally offers us a profound intuition on communication, in the form of Searle's debate with the strong AI theorists. Answering to artificial intelligence theories in the matter of the Turing Test, John Searle conceives the mental experiment of the Chinese Room: imagine, if you will, that we are in a room where we have at our disposal various books of Chinese symbols, a language we ourselves do not know, and rulebook, written in our native language, which we can use to order the symbols in strings that (without us knowing it) constitute meaningful statements in Chinese. Let us then assume that we receive, from outside the room, written messages in Chinese, which we respond to, with the help of the rulebook, with added replies – from the person interacting

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with the entire device of the Chinese Room, we ourselves seem fluent speakers of the language, without us understanding anything we have done through our operations of symbolic manipulation<sup>2</sup>. What Searle tries to explain is that the algorithmic take on communication reduces language to syntax, eliminating the signified content, which for him means reducing the mental state correlate of a state of affairs to a syntactical variable.

In the debate on the idea of the Turing Test which Searle launches, we find in fact the confrontation of two perspectives on communication: one algorithmic, the other intentional. What these iterations of both theories assume however, as an implicit hypothesis, is that, in principle, all human communication can be understood as a vast set of algorithms which cover all (or at least the vast majority of) communicational situations, algorithms that can produce, whether employed by the human brain or a calculating machine, statements in such a matter that a sufficiently specialized software cannot be distinguished from a self-conscious human subject, capable of intentionality. Searle's objection does not address the validity of this hypothesis itself, but simply the hypothesis that such an artificial intelligence can be justly called „intelligent” in absence of intentionality, and in general to the assumption that, with the right calculating capacity and set of algorithms, any hardware can generate a mind in the same way that the human brain does (a central assumption for strong A.I. theory).

The dualism that Searle proposes between symbolic syntax and semantical content attempts, without it explicitly putting the problem in these terms, to save an older paradigm of communication: that of the transfer of sense, of mental content, between sender and receiver, through symbolic intermediation. Thus he would claim that in the absence of intentional content there is no language as such, because there is no mind that can conceive it as such. What A.I. theory implicitly assumes, through the very idea of the Turing Test, is that intentionality is redundant in relation to the symbolic. A computer could very well integrate all intentional content through additional symbolic variables and algorithmic sequences. The algorithms for the word „tree” for example, could cover not only the situations in which this word can be used in a meaningful way, but also the parameters through which an object can be identified as such, and references to any number of additional algorithms that can make the machine's external components interact with the object in the proper situations. The challenge of informational sciences is thus to decompose intentional content at the level of symbolic syntax.

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<sup>2</sup> Searle John. *Minds, Brains and Science*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1984. p. 32-34

Because of this, programming languages are always frustrating to mind-body dualisms they persevere in a semiotic cycle, in which no symbol can be properly fixed upon the surface of intentional content, to which it can refer regardless of any other symbols. The break of the symbolic chain by the insertion of an element that could break the flow, and draw lines of flight, is no longer possible. We are left with the diagram of the Boolean decision tree, supported by bipolar transistors – a continuous articulation between algorithmic steps that closes the circuit in a vast loop. What appears as contingent in this system is the received content and the output effects, which are mere epiphenomena produced when external assemblages come into contact with the surface of the series of binary values that can or cannot satisfy an algorithmic sequence. The precision of the receiving apparatus and the efficiency of the emitting apparatus – in other words, the functionality of the interface – is a problem outside the semiotic system.

The syntax-content dualism is thus first reversed, as content becomes a matter of external contingency, and then eliminated: as far as the device interacts with its exterior, it does so by segmenting this exterior on multiple axes of variables, and by integrating these segments in a vast algorithmic network: the whole world is decoded and then recoded on a single plane of equivalence. Images are thus segmented into juxtapositions of pixels and recoded onto variable sets of colours, depth etc., the commands within a certain line of programming code are segmented into operational sequences and recoded as decisional graphs, the objects of economic analysis are segmented into sequences of production and consumption and recoded onto the monetary mass and so on.

All these axes themselves are then segmented into sets of variables that are recoded onto the octets that constitute the „atoms” of the information mass. In the opposite direction, these atomic units, in fact bifurcations which either stop (0) or allow (1) the flow of electrical current, constitute the circuit switches that give the electrical current its shape, that territorialise it, sequences which then operate themselves as circuit switches that outline the shape of the overall calculation within the algorithm.

This atomism is not in itself an essential characteristic of the system<sup>3</sup>, but merely the effect of a minimum threshold at which the device can register data and code it. What is essential to the system is the logic of equivalence, which does the bulk of the work, as it reduces each quality to a variable, and assigns values to that variable. The imperative here is to overcome any surplus, any ontological complexity which would interfere with the informational structure: as long as different qualia return the same result in a certain function, they can be equated to the same value.

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<sup>3</sup> Though, because of the fact that it cannot be technically overcome, it will come to characterise the limitations of the system



This value will constitute information for us, it will draw the decisional sequence for the string of algorithmic trees, and it will lead the electrical current through the circuitry of the processor (three effects of the same process, contained however immanently within its unfolding).

What's left at the end of Searle's structure, after this massive transcribing, is the singular psycho-somatic process which manifests itself when the thin film of the psyche interposes itself, as a plane of correspondence, between words and things. Here comes the divergence: Searle's position also assumes a similar operation of equivalence which produces information, but only in this case does communication, in the traditional sense, occur. Psychic experience is coded onto information, values which reference words, which are decoded afterwards into references to the psychic life of the receiver.

We find nothing of the sort in informatics. Here we only have one ontological register: a line of articulation between the network of circuit switches, an electrical flux's trajectory through the bifurcations of the transistors. A value will thus come to represent the shape of a certain segment of this line between circuit switches, with more ample processes being composed of longer circuits. Nothing is coded or decoded, there is no communication between signifying structures, but merely an articulation of circuit nodes.

This model has two important features. First the course of the flux which, in effect, articulates the network has a precursor, a certain situation of the nodes in certain position, which the flux must only close by connecting and articulating it, thus situating the completed network: from the moment a certain calculation starts in a particular node, it must cross a specific trajectory (with potential errors of course), which is not contained as a necessary determination either in the starting point (the input data), or in the sequences that orient the calculation process, but in their being situated together in a certain way.

Consequently, information is merely the relaying of this situation from its final accumulation point – we cannot say that there is any coding or decoding in any network node, as if the information would pass through stages of production. Information only exists as such within a closed circuit, as the terminal position of a particular configuration. Secondly, any connection of an external assemblage to the circuit cannot affect its results, except by introducing data in the receiving nodes (by operating as an input device), or by interfering with the circuit structure, dislocating it.

### **The Regime of Network-Communication – Language as a Social Game**

We have only taken two theoretical steps: stating an obvious fact (the algorithmic nature of language within the analytical paradigm) and explicating this self-evident fact. Nonetheless we are far from Searle and the intentionally-charged

language of late Cartesianism. Admitting that our daily language is not (at least up to a degree of analytical finesse) anything other than a repository of all situational algorithms which linguistical interactions can presuppose, we face the problem of what exactly remains intact of the model of communication as the transfer of intentional content through the medium of signs.

The fact that in this situation, the mental content behind the message is put on the same playing field as units of language, leads us on the one hand to the possibility of conveying the totality of extra-linguistic processes through algorithmic structures, integrating them in the same networks with the utterances of language (the end-goal of cognitive science), and on the other hand to a strongly materialistic linguistics, in which the material aspects of the signs of language (the acoustic waves of the phonetic material, the written signs etc.) have an equal ontological status to that of the signified content – the consequence being that the signs of language interact with other objects in the world on ontologically equal-footing, an idea already long established, reinforced by Austin's work on „performative utterances“<sup>4</sup>.

The idea that the signs used in communication can intervene in the causal chain in themselves, and not simply as mediators of the signified content, further undermines the image of the Cartesian mind, as an inexhaustible reservoir of intentionality which distinguishes the human brain from a sophisticated software. We are not attempting here, of course, to transpose a Boolean order over the world. Words, gestures, and so on, enter into common assemblages with human bodies and with the objects of the world, they are *situated* together in a certain way, and operated by a set of rules that prescribe their interaction – „the speaking of language is part of an activity or a form of life“<sup>5</sup>. The algorithm is nothing but a diagram of sequences that attempts to trace language game, it belongs to a paradigm of describing language, similar in this regard to the paradigm of the autonomous sender/receiver.

The usefulness of this way of looking at communication consists in the fact that it accentuates the functional value of each sign within the algorithm. Subjectivity is no longer the pole that draws with it the strings of communication, while holding beneath itself an obscure pool in which a message gets submerged, so that another may surface. The subject can only be detected in certain sequences, but only as subjectivity in general, as an algorithmic function. This in turn reveals in full view the social nature of communicational relations, and the social structuring of reality itself, through the sign-intermediation of the relationships between objects.

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<sup>4</sup> Austin, J.L. *Philosophical Papers*. Oxford University Press. Londra. 1970. p. 233-252

<sup>5</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. tras. by Anscombe, G.E.M. Basil Blackwell. Oxford. 1986. p. 11

„The language-function thus defined is neither informational nor communicational; it has to do neither with signifying information nor with intersubjective communication. And it is useless to abstract a significance outside information, or a subjectivity outside communication. For the subjectification proceedings and movement of significance relate to regimes of signs, or collective assemblages. The language-function is the transmission of order-words, and order-words relate to assemblages, just as assemblages relate to the incorporeal transformations constituting the variables of the function.”<sup>6</sup>

What the shift from the paradigm of clear demarcation lines between emitting subject, the message and the receiving subject (the paradigm of communication as information transfer), to the paradigm of the situational network, an assemblage of material signs, bodies and objects, traversed by rules of social language games (the paradigm of communication as relationing)<sup>7</sup>, accomplishes is the construction of a particular regime of communication, network-communication, which structures the social world. The autonomous subject is traversed and decomposed by sequences of code from every possible direction, he is no longer the neutral and monadic sender/receiver, but assumes instead a series of social roles to which he is prescribed rules of socio-linguistical interactions:

„In the course of a single day, an individual repeatedly passes from language to language. He successively speaks as "father to son" and as a boss; to his lover, he speaks an infantilized language; while sleeping he is plunged into an oneiric discourse, then abruptly returns to a professional language when the telephone rings.”<sup>8</sup>

This way of understanding language presumes crossing into a different regime of social life – the regime of network-communication does not merely propose a certain perspective on language, interchangeable with any other, but represents a series of theoretical coordinates of a historic change within the functioning of the social world. By destabilizing the communicational pole of the subject, and proposing in its stead a regulated network of social interactions through the mediation of algorithmic language-games, the regime of network-communication gradually dissolves the position of the subject of enunciation. By repeated cuts, the subject within the *cogito, ergo sum* of Descartes, suddenly finds itself to be a subject of the statement, a surface effect of grammar. Individual and collective subjectivities are thus born as effervescent points on the surface of the social network. A subject is a *finite mode*<sup>9</sup> of situation for its elements,

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<sup>6</sup> Deleuze, Gilles; Guattari, Felix. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and schizophrenia 2*. tras. Massumi, Brian. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis. 1987. p. 85

<sup>7</sup> Codoban, Aurel. *Imperiul Comunicării. Corp, Imagine și Relaționare*. Idea Design&Print. Cluj-Napoca. 2011. p. 45-48

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze, Gilles; Guattari, Felix. *Ibidem* p. 94

<sup>9</sup> In the Spinozian sense of the concept – “By mode I mean the affections of substance, that is, that which is in something else and is conceived through something else” (Ethics, I,d5), see Spinoza, Baruch. *Ethics*, in *Completed Works* (p.213-382). Hackett Publishing Company. Indianapolis. 2002. p. 217

but, at the same time, the fluxes that push these elements towards the subject-mode of situation already foreshadow the subject, which floats as a force vector at the vantage point of these fluxes, at their cutting-edge (ensuring the effectiveness of the process of capturing the elements of the future subject as they come into form), then operating as the force that hold these elements situated together. We can find more thorough analysis of this in Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, where he describes the process of subjectivation in depth<sup>10</sup>, as well as his work with Guattari on the subjectivity of the celibate machine, which is diffuse, clotting together only in the points where a desiring-machine produces libidinal consumption (*Voluptas*) and traveling alongside this productive flow<sup>11</sup>.

Insofar as our current discussion goes, it is sufficient to remark the incorporeal status of this subjectivity, placed in a feedback loop with the assemblage that generates it, and that it in turn generates – incorporeal because it does not effectively become embodied in any of its elements, and thus does not become a subject of enunciation. For example, although we may identify, within a series of images, the social status of an individual (through the commodities with which he individualises his body), this type of subjectivity no longer has a privileged form in which it can embody – the body and commodities' common mode of situating are a *presentation* of the subjectivity which gathers them together, and not an *incarnation*. Here we can see clearly the dynamic character of capitalism, per Marx's description, which brings out the contingent core in every old essence.

All signs operate in a similar manner – they do not *incarnate* onto any one instantiation (*lemon* is never this or that lemon), but rather *present* themselves through each of their instantiations (be it the graphical sign or phonetic utterance, the image or symbol that stands for the object, or the object itself). A sign already contains a mode of situating matter, which puts us, as subjects introduced into language, into a relationship with the material object thus constituted, while at the same time establishing the rules by which this relationship will function. A sign situates matter in a certain mode by establishing how we should relate to that particular compositum of matter, thus producing the elements of its object, and how we should relate to the object, thus becoming subjects of that object, the subjects of that specific statement, as well as establishing the rules by which that statement will take form – it constitutes the common situation of a subject and object as a statement with its particular grammar. The sign thus generates an assemblage, not

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<sup>10</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Patton, Paul. Columbia University Press. New York. 1994. p. 70-128

<sup>11</sup> Deleuze, Gilles; Guattari, Felix. *AntiOedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia I*. Trans. Hurley, Robert; Seem, Mark and Lane, Helen R.. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis. 2000. p. 16-21

through the signifying matter itself, which is already part of the assemblage, but as an incorporeal accumulation point, that unfolds the assemblage around it, that situates it together.

These signs do not operate as transcendental universalities – in the regime of network-communication the transcendental Subject which can utter such signs is absent, there is no God that can cast judgement. Each sign is thus a singular sign, placed however in relation with every other singular sign, all of them traversed by the forces of a trans-subjective, trans-situational grammar. Signs carry power, they operate as order-words<sup>12</sup>. We constantly have concentrations of power in the social world, be they local or global, passing or entrenched, despite the diffuse nature of the network we constantly see the formation of assemblages of power relations (what Foucault would call an apparatus). The explicit contingent and temporary nature of the new network of signs doesn't change in any way the workings of power through it – we can still say that "we give children language, pens, and notebooks as we give workers shovels and pickaxes."<sup>13</sup>

What is inherently oppressive in this system is its capacity to capture any new modes of enunciation. The enthusiastic apologists of the online medium for example, who foresaw new revolutionary potentialities for communication within the world wide web, did not even get a chance to discuss their predictions and analysis at length before these new instruments and idioms were greeted with open arms by the circuits of capital and mainstream communication. As the network-regime extends its reach to a global scale, global flows require local integrated structures to propagate, and these local assemblages require global flows to fuel them. In the end the interdependency of all assemblages draws a reactive-plane that circles the world, constituting the baseline off of which all network nodes emerge, which allows it to capture the new and integrate it into the dominant regime.

There are always errors, blockages and crises in the functioning of this regime, of course, but, just as information science and computer engineering have solved the issues with their networks, by developing algorithms which foresee and avert crises, and by integrating small errors in the normal functioning of the machine, so too do the science of economy and governance hope that, in the long term, their technical progress can consolidate a stable system, in which the myriad errors are already statistically accounted for, and the crises predictable and easily avoided. However this yearning to do away with history ends up clashing with the Real, because, while versatile and omnipresent, the regime of network-communication

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<sup>12</sup> Deleuze, Gilles; Guattari, Felix. *A Thousand Plateaus*. p. 76ff.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem* p. 76

itself does not provide a place for the real. Anything given under a sign has already suppressed, through the unity and self-identity of the sign, the discontinuity and self-difference of the Real.

The formulations of statistics and functions try to cover these deficiencies, but they themselves are reintegrated into the order of network-communication – we need only see the way in which any socio-economic statistic is reduced to the logic of identity by the majority force operating within society. These types of expressions are already the pre-signs of a different communicational paradigm. The irony is that the very resilience to change that the regime of network-communication exhibits, sabotages its chances of reconciliation with the manifestations of the Real. Between signs, outside and inside them, the Real produces (itself) unwaveringly, in an infinitely richer abundance than anything the regime of network-communication, even with its pretence of universal expansion, can hope to cover. To get a glimpse of where this regime starts cracking, we will focus on the slips in the normal functioning of its signs, following these breaches towards what hopefully will constitute a new form of expression.

### **The Problem of Expression – Language as a Means of Production**

In the *plateau* on faciality, Deleuze&Guattari claim, from the very beginning, that “significance is never without a white wall upon which it inscribes its signs and redundancies” and that “subjectification is never without a black hole in which it ledges its consciousness, passion and redundancies”<sup>14</sup>. From here on they will analyse faciality as a “white wall/black hole system”, “a chalk face with eyes cut in for a black hole”<sup>15</sup>, taking up schizo-analysis in relation to the problem of effacement.

What they obtain is a mixed semiotics: on the one hand the modulations on the surface of the skin, on the other the processes of subjectification that operate beneath the depth of the eyes. They cannot be properly reduced to a single system of signification: outside the subject we still find gestures, an entire phenotechnical use of the head (which should not be confused with the face) – the fixed eyes, tilted ears, exposed fangs and so on.

At the same time we can draw the diagrams of subjective structures, and correlate them with a general grammar, without taking into account concrete acts of signification, except as accidental, contingent to grammar (the generative grammar

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem* p. 167

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*

of Chomsky can be taken in this direction – even more so if we seek its fundamentals in evolutionary psychology, which reduces phenotype to an epiphenomenon of the genetic code).

Both systems work properly, without signifying anything: the interactions of animals remain problems of ethology, and not semiotics (there are two bodies situated together in a territory – but not two subjects), and the form of the signifier remains indeterminate without it being expressed in gestures and words. The modulation of matter into recognizable forms – its transformation into signifiers – takes place only when it is traversed by a subjectifying apparatus, and conversely, the structures of subjectivity are only concretely subjectified within the modulations of signs. We thus have subjective structure operating from the level of black holes, twisting the white wall, grabbing it from all sides and modelling it.

We can proceed even further, with some caution. The wall is not necessarily the surface of the skin, but can also be the surface of an utterance, or of writing. In the case of speech, between different words and their phonetic units, we have repeated drops into silence, not even a moment long, which nonetheless clearly punctuate the phonetic flow with small local variations.

We cannot however speak of discontinuity, except at the level of discourse, of the signifying chain, which is thus submerged into a wall of continuous sound: when we're in a public space, there is a barrage of voices, music, engines, honking horns, cups chinking, when we're in an intimate setting, we're still surrounded by the sounds of breathing, the rattle of old appliances, water running through the pipework, and from somewhere outside the distant roar of a vehicle, a bird chirping or rain dripping – even the most profound silence produces a phonetic effect.

In these plunges back into the wall of sound, the subject is registered, producing similar effects as in the case of faciality: it distances or narrows the gaps between sounds, it affects tonalities, thickens or thins consonants, lengthens or shortens vowels etc. All of these points to a composed plane of the subjectified discourse where we can unravel intentions, be moved by affects and from whence we can be traversed by power.

In the case of writing, things get slightly more complicated. Here the space between words, letters and inside the letters can certainly produce effects, but these can also be taken as the effects of the letters black cut on the white sheet of paper, the traces of ink produce on the surface of the paper the specific determinate shapes of the letters: their font, the distance between them, underlines, bolding, punctuation effects etc. Still the letters themselves are conventional ready-made objects, and no matter how much they're disfigured (here we could only invoke the experiments of Dada, or the hypergraphism of Isidore Isou), they seem to be stretched, squeezed, twisted, decomposed or spread out by a foreign machine. What happened to the black holes?

This problem has already existed, but only the lack of an immediate presence of the author in the case of writing reveals it clearly. Even if the holes in the face (pupils, nostrils, mouth) seem to pull the surface of the face with them, they are in no smaller measure determined by the skin that draws their frontier. Even by erasing them we could still conceive of an expressive smooth face folding in on itself. Properly speaking, they are both determined by a regime of faciality that does not however precede them (much in the same way that the origin of language does not precede actual spoken language, or in the way capital does not precede modern relations of production), but that both the white wall and the black hole take to be their fundamental presupposition, as a precondition that lifts the white wall as film above the animal head, and that pushes into the depth of the black hole until it creates a space for subjectivity.

This face that falls over the head, and constitutes itself as its signifying surface, individuating it, registering its subjectivity in its gaps, does not produce a clear central point – or rather it produces an indeterminate mobile one. It could be fixed as a “third eye”, a pure and pathological subjectivity that the logocentric traditions of the East and West obsess over, but usually it glides between the gaze, the gesture, the open mouth, temporarily hanging on to one or the other, as partial determinations, small bases of operations from where it launches the signifying effects of the face.

This mark of singularity traverses in the same way the phonetic body of speech, trying to modulate the rough sounds of the larynx, or to seek, in mid-fall between sounds, the next word. It is not a subject we are dealing with here – that comes afterwards, as a filter that blocks specific expressions; here we find ourselves in the realm of the a-subjective, where the absolute difference inherent in the Real of the sound speaks. Coming back to writing, things become clearer: here the concrete subject has retired, leaving behind only what the author function can produce within the text, and the modulations of the signifying matter depend all of a sudden on the gaze of the reader just as much as (or even more than) the graphic construction of the writing.

‘What an incomprehensible text!’, ‘What pointless verbosity!’, ‘What an absurd person!’ are all potential replies at the chance meeting of two irreconcilable registers. At the level of each of them, and between them, however works difference as the productive essence of things, which brings forth an actualization out of the virtual background that is codetermined by the difference of the written text, the situation of the text and the reader meeting and the openness towards this unexpected meeting (as goodwill, wonder, hostility, marvel, recoil under the guise of indifference or resignation etc.).



The written text best reveals all of these things, precisely because it suppresses to a certain degree the frame of intersubjectivity, which relentlessly constrains its subjects to the rigors of a collective assemblage of enunciation (we speak in a certain way in schools, at the police station, between friends, between boys or girls, and as a result we become students, teachers, witnesses, snitches, accused, parents, children etc.). In writing was fixed (by reconstitution) under the spatial domination of the specious present (as William James calls it<sup>16</sup>), is set free, and opens up to repeated elaborations, re-readings, different dispositions and events outside the text begin permeating it, it becomes criss-crossed by numerous assemblages to which the author or reader connect, and becomes a virtual surface instead of rigid actuality.

However we mustn't fool ourselves: this does not automatically make the text a more liberated medium of language, nor does it rob speech of its expressive means. Over numerous texts we have interpretations locking down, through them the same power relations that envelope the rest of the social field, and the practice of writing and reading always accumulates a number of stock-phrases and clichés, repetition automatisms, which try to suppress the essential difference of words, by reabsorbing them into their order-word forms, reducing them to their lowest productive capacity. Nonetheless, writing exhibits a certain resilience, due to the fact that signs persist in their inscribed forms onto the page, and no matter the attempts at capturing its sense, it never ceases to differentiate and to accumulate new material outside of it: even banned or burned, it takes up its suppression as a mark of distinction which the remaining copies in circulation will bear. Its simple material persistence allows it an ample duration in which the Real beneath it can properly express itself.

In speech things appear differently. Here words once spoken are already captured and contextualized, they trigger immediate reactions and spark their reply, they are hurried, snatched from their process of differentiation, and only the labour of memory can soften their rigidity. More automatisms than products of spontaneity, and covering up their silence everywhere, they represent, despite their appearance, an attempt to spatialize and territorialize pure difference, fixing it in a situation of network-communication (neobehaviorism owes its recent success in discourse analysis through relational frames, to this very fact<sup>17</sup>). Speech is much more the realm of symptomatology.

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<sup>16</sup> James, William. *Writings 1878-1899*. Literary Classics of the United States. New York. 1992. p. 266

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Hayes, S.C.; Barnes-Holmes, D.; Roche, B. (Eds.). *Relational Frame Theory: A Post-Skinnerian account of human language and cognition*. Plenum Press. New York. 2001.

At the same time, speech allows us to detect a phenomenon which writing, as a fully completed block of text, only presents as a trace, namely the act of differentiation. Here the tension between the Deleuzian interpretation of the gap and its psychoanalytic sources reveals itself. Deleuze's thinking, sealed tight against any intrusion of negativity, does not interpret the gap between signifiers as a bottomless chasm, over which we are carried by a primal Signifier, situated above the discourse, but as an opening in the signifying matter towards the production (differentiation) of the next element in the signifying chain. This does not mean that a Signifier above the discourse, a Master-Signifier, doesn't intervene, but simply that its role is to establish what can and cannot be said, appearing thus as a conjugating machine, indicating what path we should pursue. An algorithmic Decider, or a social-game Arbiter, this Signifier is simply generated by the flows of power within the social field (which, as we've seen with the sign in general, presupposes the existence of this very Signifier).

Deleuze's interest naturally goes towards barring this Signifier and the subjectivity it generates, towards effacing faciality and jamming speech – in general, towards deepening the gap, the undetermination of the space beside us, which would thus permit the purely temporal developing of the process of difference. Things are similar when it comes to lack (*la manqué*). The limits of a discursive assemblage, its essential incompleteness, that push it outside itself to branch to ever newer elements, thus constituting the essence of desire, does not present itself in Deleuze's philosophy as lack (except in the sense that the end of a series of differentiation retrojects its incompletable openness back onto the entire series). Desire does indeed have at its core the unfinished status of any assemblage, but this incompleteness is entirely positive: the absolute difference that operates at the level of each being constantly produces differentiations, destabilizing any determination and producing a vast residue that will not have been actualized. As Lacan would put it, there is no absence at the level of the Real<sup>18</sup>.

In the ready-made discourse, this process of differentiation only leaves traces, which can be located in the gaps within language, that thus present themselves not just as empty spaces in which the subject that gathers together the signifying chain can inscribe itself, but as openings in which a signifier can always appear (for example the layers of marginalia on old books, often belonging to different authors, driving the process of differentiation, while at the same time dislocating the author's position). Beyond their function of cutting signs out of senseless undifferentiated

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<sup>18</sup> Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar. Book II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-55*. Trans. Sylvana Tomaselli. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1988. p.313

babble, the gaps in language bear at the same time (as cuts within cuts – „the cut of Apelles” – as Agamben calls them<sup>19</sup>) infinitesimally thin breaches, through which a new enunciation, a new being, a new differentiation can come forth.

At the end of each segment of the signifying chain we find an opening, a leap into the void, where difference awaits as a productive surface. The Deleuzian predilection for delirium and dissociation attempts to block the attempt of any order from filling the open speaking position. In a pinch, we experiment with what we have at hand (hence his appreciation for Dada or Burroughs). But the end goal requires caution and pragmatism, Deleuze not pursuing some symbolic anarchy, but precisely the creation of a breach, a silence large and receptive enough to give way to the new – suspending the current fixed arrangement of a situation, to *make* the time in which the new, that element of novelty that restructures our situation in an revolutionary way, can be produced.

The productive function of delirium<sup>20</sup> consists in forming new circuits, attempting to give the Real the right to express itself in the suspended signifying chain, undermining the algorithms and automatisms of a socio-discursive regime with the pretence of universality. The expressivity that characterizes the inventions of delirium consists in their active character: unlike the formulas typical of order-words, which (re)establish the social order in a given situation, the expressions of delirium irrupt within the situation and open it in its totality, extending their effects on the elements that are situated together. Delirium is of course the name of pathologies of the signifying chain, but it is at the same time the process of dissolution of an established context, that makes room for an expression of the Real, through an statement that operates at the maximum intensity of performativity – as a performative utterance that allows for the re-situation of the assemblage from within which we speak.

Beyond this lie the problems of pragmatics: how to ensure a productive silence? How to stop the re-capture of the new? How to dodge the pathologies of old language games? A question may arise as to how can linguistic expressions that surpass their socio-discursive regime appear<sup>21</sup>, however this problem is easily

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<sup>19</sup> Agamben, Giorgio. *The time that remains. A commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Trans. Dailey, Patricia. Stanford University Press. Stanford. 2005. p. 49

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze and Guattari use the schizophrenic delirium as a prototype for all the productive activity of language, but the concept refers to a number of ways in which language is used, that are already established: the delirium of oral storytelling, the profetic delirium, the poetic delirium, the philosophical delirium placed at the very limits of our knowledge etc.

<sup>21</sup> But, as we've already established, there is no language that has not already mobilized, as an incorporeal mode of situation, all the material fluxes of its given situation.

solved, when considering that a delirium is always a collective productive process, reaching its maximum potential of expression in a future event, which retroactively changes all past instantiations to repetitions of a final event that has yet to arrive. Insofar as we struggle philosophically with these issues, perhaps the most important question for a philosophical pragmatic approach to delirium is what arises within silence and where does it lead us?

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Christoph Asmuth, *Interpretation – Transformation: Das Platonbild bei Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher und Schopenhauer und das Legitimationsproblem der Philosophiegeschichte*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006.  
ISBN: 3-525-30152-9**

Das hier zu besprechende, hoch interessante Buch des Autors wurde im Jahre 2003 als Habilitationsschrift an der Geisteswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der TU Berlin angenommen. Der Verfasser versucht darin die unterschiedlichen Platonbilder wichtiger Philosophen des 19. Jahrhunderts darzustellen. Da dieses Thema ebenfalls sehr eng mit dem deutschen Idealismus verbunden ist spannt das Buch einen sehr weiten Rahmen. Einerseits beschäftigt sich der Autor mit den Vertretern des deutschen Idealismus wie unter anderem Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher und Schopenhauer, andererseits versucht er deren Platonbilder anhand der Leitbegriffe "Interpretation" und "Transformation" systematisch zu reflektieren. Diese beiden Begriffe scheinen sehr geeignet zu sein, um die unterschiedlichen Platonrezeptionen dieser Philosophen von dem Charakter einer "bloßen" Philosophiegeschichte zu befreien.

Christoph Asmuth erörtert das Legitimationsproblem der Philosophiegeschichte auf einer sehr überzeugenden Art und Weise, indem er das zu bearbeitende Material systematisch reflektiert und die Ergebnisse effektiv in einer kohärenten Theorie zusammenfasst.

Nach unserem Autor seien die beiden Wissenschaftsdisziplinen systematische Philosophie und Geschichte der Philosophie untrennbar

miteinander verbunden, so dass sie zu einem Gefüge zusammengefasst werden müssen. Diese These versucht Asmuth anhand der Platonrezeptionen der oben genannten fünf Philosophen des 19. Jahrhunderts unter Beweis zu stellen.

Die Annahme, dass zwischen der systematischen Philosophie und der Geschichte der Philosophie eine Spannung herrsche, scheint ein in der wissenschaftlichen Welt weit verbreitetes Phänomen zu sein, das in der vorliegenden Habilitationsarbeit sehr umfassend und überzeugend dargestellt wird.<sup>1</sup> Das Ziel

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<sup>1</sup> Eine umfangreiche Diskussion über dieses Thema ist im folgendem Buch zu sehen: *Philosophy in History: Essays on the historiography of philosophy*, ed. by Richard Rorty, J.B. Schneewind and Quentin Skinner. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993. Einige Aufsätze sind direkt relevant zu dem Thema: Charles Taylor, „Philosophy and its history“, S. 17-30; Alasdair Macintyre, „The relationship of philosophy to its past“, S. 31-48; Richard Rorty, „The historiography of philosophy: four genres“, S. 49-78; Lorenz Krüger, „Why do we study of history of philosophy?“, S. 77-102; Wolf Lepenies, „‘Interesting questions’ in the history of philosophy and elsewhere“, S. 141-172. Einige andere Werke sind erwähnenswert: Lutz Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert: Zur Wissenschaftstheorie der Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung und -betrachtung*, Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain Verlag, 1968;

dieser Arbeit lag darin, die vermeintliche Spannung zwischen den oben genannten Wissenschaftszweigen durch eine Studie über das Platonbild im deutschen Idealismus endgültig aufzuheben. Der Autor selbst sagt dazu folgendes: „In gewisser Hinsicht ist dies das Thema des vorliegenden Buches: Es vertritt die Auffassung, dass es unmöglich ist, den historischen Bestand der Philosophie von der Systematik zu trennen. Es argumentiert für die Relevanz der Philosophiegeschichte im Hinblick auf die Philosophie. Es will die Situation analysieren und einen Vorschlag unterbreiten, wie das Verhältnis der Philosophie zu ihrer Geschichte selbst philosophisch gedacht werden kann.“ (S. 11). Dazu gehören nicht nur die Darstellung eines philosophischen Themas im historischen Kontext, sondern auch dessen interpretierende und transformierende Aspekte, die „Teil einer genetischen Rekonstruktion tatsächlicher, d.h. konkreter und systematische Beschäftigung mit der Philosophiegeschichte“ (S.13) gewesen sind.

Der Autor bezeichnet seine Studie nicht als eine Rezeptionsgeschichte, sondern vielmehr als eine theoretische Aufarbeitung der „Aneignung“<sup>2</sup> des fremden intellektuellen Gedanken-

guts: „Es wird darum gehen, zu beschreiben, wie ein anderes theoretisches und historisches Umfeld zu einer Neubewertung der Platonischen Texte führt. Es wird darum zu tun sein, die Bedingungen aufzuweisen, unter denen das ursprünglich fremde Material in eine neue Gedankenkonstellation eindringt und letztlich eine Transformation erfährt. Dadurch wird die Vorstellung unterwandert, es handle sich bei

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Forschungsgruppe unter dem Namen STEP (Science and Technology in the European Periphery) ist gegründet. Siehe: [www.uoa.gr/step](http://www.uoa.gr/step). Diese Gruppe beabsichtigt das Eindringen der neuen intellektuellen und wissenschaftlichen Ideen nach der wissenschaftlichen Revolution in Europäische Peripherie zu forschen. Ihres Erachtens nach waren die Kulturen, die diese neuen Ideen rezipieren, keine passiven Elemente in dieser Beziehung, sondern sie eignen sich diese neuen Ideen nach ihren lokalen, traditionellen und existierenden Kulturen an. Kostas Gavroglu hat viele Beiträge über die Aneignung der wissenschaftlichen Ideen in griechisch gesprochenen Territorien geschrieben. Siehe für die List seiner Werke: [http://www.iono.noa.gr/hellinonmimon/gavroglu\\_pub.htm](http://www.iono.noa.gr/hellinonmimon/gavroglu_pub.htm). Einige seiner Aufsätze über dieses Thema sind zu erwähnen: mit D. Dialetis, „Appropriating the new scientific ideas in the Greek speaking regions during the 17th and 18th Centuries“, *Die Griechen und Europa - Außen und Innensichten im Wandel der Zeit*, H. Heppner - O. Katsiardi-Hering (Editors), Wien: Böhlau, 1998, S. 69-102; mit D. Dialetis und M. Patiniotis, „The Sciences in the Greek Speaking Regions During the 17th and 18th Centuries: The process of appropriation and the dynamics of reception and resistance“, *ARCHIMEDES*, Bd. 2, 1997; „The transmission to and the assimilation of scientific ideas in the Greek speaking world 1700-1900: The case of chemistry“ *The Making of the Chemist, The Social History of Chemistry in Europe 1789-1914*, edited by D.Knight, H.Kragh, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, S. 289-304.

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Wolfgang Wieland, „Über den Grund des Interesses der Philosophie an ihrer Geschichte“, S. 9-30; Wolfgang Röd, „Fortschritt und Rückschritt in der Philosophiegeschichte“, S. 31-43; Hans Michael Baumgartner, „Anspruch und Einlösbarkeit: Geschichtstheoretische Bemerkungen zur Idee einer adäquaten Philosophiegeschichte“, S. 44-61, diese drei Aufsätze sind im folgenden Buch erschienen: *Veritas filia temporis? Philosophiegeschichte zwischen Wahrheit und Geschichte: Festschrift für Rainer Specht zum 65. Geburtstag*, hrsg. von Rolf W. Puster, Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995. Für die neuere Literatur zu diesem Thema, siehe: Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, *Philosophiegeschichte*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> In englischer Sprache wird dieser Begriff mit dem Konzept „appropriation“ übersetzt. Eine

historischen Verstehensprozessen – im allgemeinen Sinne – um Vorgänge, die mit einem realistischen Schema von Ursache und Wirkung und nach dem Modus historischer Ereignisse zu erklären seien, etwa derart, dass die Lektüre Platons einen bestimmten Niederschlag in den Werken eines Autors, eine gewisse Veränderung seines Denkens hervorgerufen habe.“ (S. 16) Genau an dieser Stelle sehen wir den Versuch des Autors die historische Darstellung in das Systematische umzuwandeln, das er anhand der Analyse der einzelnen Autoren analytisch aufzeigt.

Nach der Darstellung der verschiedenen Platonbilder gibt Asmuth am Ende seiner Studie zwei Diskussionswege an: Einerseits setzt er sich mit der Problematik der Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte auseinander, andererseits debattiert er die Möglichkeit einer Interpretation und Transformation der historisch-philosophischen Kenntnisse in ein systematisches Philosophieren. Sein Ziel ist nicht die Darstellung „einer Rezeptionsgeschichte des antiken Denkens“, sondern vielmehr die Entwicklung eines grundlegenden Verhältnisses von Philosophie und Philosophiegeschichte“, welches er nach dem Umtausch von „Deutung und Verwandlung des Platonischen Denkens“ (S. 272), das er als ein Beispiel zu diesem Verhältnis herausliest.

Im vorletzten Abschnitt wird die Philosophiegeschichte problematisiert: „Es besteht der Verdacht, die Philosophiegeschichte sei – ganz oder teilweise – irrelevant.“ (S. 274) Dieser Verdacht wird mit der Zeit in einen Konsensus umgewandelt, „dass die Philosophiegeschichte ein substantieller Bestandteil der Philosophie ist und dies auch bleiben sollte.“ (S. 279) Nachdem er die grundlegenden Positionen in Bezug auf die Relevanz oder Irrelevanz der Philosophiegeschichte in der Philosophie vorgestellt hat, beschäftigt er sich mit

den Grundlagen dieser Standpunkte. Nach seiner Besprechung wird der Gültigkeitsbereich von dem „Neuen“ noch überzeugender als dem „Alten“ aus. Diese Illusion lehnt Asmuth ab, da er die Philosophiegeschichte als „ein lebendiger Speicher des vergangenen Denkens“ annimmt. (S. 313).

Nach diesem Urteil wird im letzten Abschnitt des Buches über die verschiedenen Modi der Interpretation und Transformation diskutiert.<sup>3</sup> Demnach suggeriert der Autor für beide Phänomene vier verschiedene Modi, wodurch Interpretation und Transformation des philosophischen Gegenstandes ermöglicht wird. Zur Interpretation gehören die Funktionen der Darstellung, Prüfung, Einordnung und Bewertung, wohingegen die Projizierung, Dekontextuierung, Implementierung und Identifizierung zur Transformation gehören. Asmuth versucht in diesem Abschnitt die Relevanz seiner Studie für die einzelnen Verstehensebenen reflektierend zu erklären.

Für ihn endet dieser Prozess mit der Identifizierung, die die Transformationsprozedur mit der vollen Ausprägung zum Ende bringt. Daher verschwindet der fremde Charakter des philosophischen Gegenstandes der transformierten Kenntnisse. Daraus bildet sich eigenes philosophisches Denken. Das eigene Denken bringt den Verstehensprozess, der aus der Identitäts- und Differenzbildung stammt, hervor: „Im Nachdenken der Gedanken setze ich mein Denken an die Stelle der ursprünglichen, über das ich nachdenke. Das gelingt allerdings nur, wenn sich das ursprüngliche Denken durch die vitalisierende Kraft des eigenen Denkens fassen

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<sup>3</sup> Ein anderes Werk in der Ästhetik in diesem Thema ist 2007 erschienen: Michael Krausz, *Interpretation and transformation: explorations in art and the self*, Amsterdam [u.a.], Rodopi, 2007.



lässt. Es ist die quecksilbrige Essenz des Denkens, die in die Poren des Textes, sei es auch eines gänzlich fremden, eindringt, ihn aufschließt und die toten Gedanken in lebendiges Philosophieren verwandelt. Da diesem Denken das Prüfen und Selbstprüfen eingeschrieben ist, wird es sich bewusst sein, dass es das Fremde in seiner Fremdheit auffasst, es selbst dadurch verwandelt und sich aneignet. Es wird sich bewusst sein, wenn es die Grenze überschreitet und das Fremde als Eigenes fasst. Das ist der Schritt, der die *Interpretation* zur *Transformation* werden lässt. Während das Fremde, Andere, Unverstandene, Unzugängliche für die Interpretation eine Grenze bleibt, die sich im Auslegungsgeschehen als dynamisch erweisen kann, so besteht die Transformation darin, dass das Fremde im Eigenen aufgeht. Dies geschieht nie restlos, dass es – für einen Dritten – wie ein Einschluß erkennbar bleibt. Es ist noch

zu identifizieren, man kann es namhaft machen, aber es ist Teil eines neuen, eines anderen Denkens.“ (S. 346)

Das Denken, das durch Interpretation und Transformation die fremden Erkenntnisse zum Eigentum umwandeln lässt, fängt in dem Moment wieder einen neuen zyklischen Prozess an, um das Nachgedachte zu einem verstandenen Gegenstand umformen zu können: Interpretation – Transformation.

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