

# TO COME INTO BEING HEGEL, DELEUZE, AND THE THEATER OF MOVEMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores two attempts to conceive of a genetic model of cognition and ontology of becoming through divergent accounts of the relation between conceptual and non-conceptual difference: Hegel's conceptual realist account of becoming as the movement of radical negativity, and Deleuze's structural realist account of Ideas as the individuation of intensive difference. I show how both attempts organize their respective accounts in relation to the perceived limitations of representation, understood either as an impure kind of cognition, or as a dogmatic model of thought as recognition. In both cases, representation is pathologized as preventing philosophy from grasping the creative dimension of thought, and its place within a dynamic reality.

Nevertheless, I argue that just like the conceptual realist strategy surreptitiously relies on an unintelligible criterion of non-conceptual difference to set the dialectical movement of conceptual contradiction in motion, so the structural realist attempt to subtract becoming from the concept surreptitiously relies on the conceptual hypostasis by philosophy in order to assign an ontological valence to specific mathematical paradigms. By showing their disavowed dependence on what they presumably overcome, I finally indicate the necessity to elucidate the inextricability between the conceptual, structural, and the ontological dimensions of the "universe of discourse," within which the semantic and epistemological scope of philosophy become integral to a revisionary account of representational cognition.

**KEYWORDS:** Hegel; Deleuze; Structural Realism; Conceptual Realism; Becoming; Difference; Formal Ontology; Representation

## INTRODUCTION

There are two foundational insights that animate the birth and unfolding of

ontological reflection in Western philosophical history:

- 1) *The Heraclitean insight* - The material world disclosed to the senses, the qualities of sensing themselves, as much as the life of thought, have change as their primitive law and singular constant: *the coming into and out of being* of all bodies, the flux of sensations and their qualities, the stream of consciousness and thoughts, the upheavals of history, etc. Reality is dynamic, caught in cycles of generation and destruction; *becoming* is ubiquitous, and *being* appears as a fleeting retention or abstraction in relation to it.<sup>1</sup>
- 2) *The Parmenidean insight*: Everything that can be *said to be*, whether in the world, in sensing, or in thought, supposes some kind of permanence to be subsistent, perceptible, or intelligible. Things, sensations, thoughts, and even history, are stamped by the seal of identity, even as they undergo change and include multiplicity within them. Reality is unitary and permanent: things subsist in time, sensations enjoy intrinsic qualities, thoughts constitute the medium of the universal, and history is shaped by impersonal structures that organize all natural and cultural being.<sup>2</sup>

At this level of abstraction, the relation between being and becoming points simultaneously to a complimentary and disjunctive task. On the one hand, it points to a question of explanatory priority: does one explain becoming in terms of being, or being in terms of becoming? Does one explain change, dynamicity, eventfulness, temporality in terms of permanence, stability, ordinariness, or the other way around? On the other hand, it points to a question of explanatory dependency: being and becoming are only understood in relation to the other, so that in their opposition they remain mutually inextricable.

In its incipient historical formulation, this dyad organizes the metaphysical debate that organizes the tension between sophistry and philosophy: do the obscure, Heraclitean rivers wash away every identity as illusory permanence, or

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<sup>1</sup> Diogenes Laertius famously describes Heraclitus' philosophy as follows: "All things come into being by conflict of opposites, and the sum of things (τὰ ὅλα *ta hola* ("the whole") flows like a stream."

<sup>2</sup> "We can speak and think only of what exists. And what exists is uncreated and imperishable for it is whole and unchanging and complete. It was not or nor shall be different since it is now, all at once, one and continuous."

is the flux of the sensible only but the lowliest form of eternal and unitary being? During the modern period, however, it becomes inherent to epistemological reflection, and particularly to attempts to traverse the skeptical and idealist conclusions associated with representational theories of experience.<sup>3</sup> For such representational theories, many argued, remained beholden to certain dogmatic assumptions concerning the nature of being and of thought, occluding their primary productive and creative dimensions. The attempt to derogate representation is therefore continuous with a revalorization of becoming an attempt to do justice to the dynamic core of both nature and thought. For such representational theories, many argued, remained beholden to certain dogmatic assumptions concerning the nature of being and of thought, occluding their primary productive and creative dimensions. The attempt to derogate representation is therefore continuous with a revalorization of becoming an attempt to do justice to the dynamic core of both nature and thought.

This paper examines two attempts to provide a novel, and positive metaphysics of becoming as a *genetic* principle sufficient to give a non-representational model for thought, and a dynamic conception of nature. The first follows the Parmenidean insight in the order of explanation: Hegel's *conceptual realist* account of becoming as the reciprocal passing and unity of pure being into nothingness, which catalyzes the movement of contradiction as the motor of speculative logic. The second follows the Heraclitean priority: Deleuze's structural realist account of becoming as the "intensive individuation" of virtual Ideas, in relation to which all actual individuals, species, and their parts emerge

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<sup>3</sup> Conceived as a historical predicament, not only implicating the destiny of philosophy but, in its most dramatic moments, of mankind as a whole. Nietzsche pathologizes the philosophical impetus toward truth in the name of the liberation of the creative will. Bergson argues that underlying the reality composed of discrete objects and their properties by the intellect lays the real of pure duration as a restless qualitative becoming. Heidegger associates the privilege to Being that organizes substance ontologies the perils of a metaphysics of presence or "ontotheology" whose ultimate consequences prove fatal for thought. In response to this predicament and verdict against the vices and prominence of the Parmenidean legacy in philosophy, many conceive of an ontology of becoming as precisely a way to correct the ahistoricist, idealist, representationalist, and theological residues of such ontologies. And yet if becoming is not to become another dogmatic metaphysical position, the radicalization of metaphysics against substance and the affirmation of becoming as prior to being must itself be grounded, rather than taken as a primitive assumption; if all being is explained in terms of becoming, the priority accorded to the latter must in turn be intelligible.

as conditioned results of a morphogenetic process. Both accounts postulate a unitary and naturalist account of becoming as a lever to overcome representation, understood either as (1) an inferior or provisional *kind of cognition* to be superseded by conceptual articulation and differentiation (Hegel), or (2) as an inadequate *model of cognition* to be superseded by a formal account of non-conceptual difference (Deleuze).

In elucidating how they attempt to overcome representation by articulating a new account of becoming and difference, I argue that both accounts presuppose what they overtly disavow. For just like the attempt to assimilate becoming to the concept supposes an unstated criterion of non-conceptual difference to organize the vanishing of the conceptual difference between being and nothing, so the attempt to positively understand becoming in structural terms presupposes a series of conceptual differences that serve to assign the forms of the calculus to all ontico-ontological “orders” and “varieties” of Ideas, providing their contentual dimension. In diagnosing this implicit dependency on what they claim to overcome, I show how conceptual and structural realist approaches must complement each other, such that the limitations imposed by representation function as a positive condition to think of the articulation between the formal, semantic, and ontological dimensions of a structural *philosophical systematics*.

## HEGEL’S CRITIQUE OF REPRESENTATION: THE CONVERSION TO THE CONCEPT

### a. *Representation and Cognition*

While the term “representation” enjoys a certain plurivocity across Hegel’s works, it invariably designates an inferior and transitory *kind* of experience, as well as a primitive *stage* in a process leading philosophy from its dogmatic metaphysical stage to its speculative apotheosis. At the outset of the *Encyclopedia Logic*, *representation* is first distinguished from *cognition*, comprising the familiar experience of objects by thinking beings before they become philosophical-scientific *concepts*. While *representations* constitute the “objects” of study for all empirical science, in what always amounts to an impure “mixture” of thinking with “feeling and perception,” *concepts* involve the “conversion” of such representations to “thinking-*cognition*” and “comprehension.”

[I] the order of time consciousness produces *representations* of objects before it produces *concepts* of them; and that the *thinking* spirit only advances to thinking cognition and comprehension by going *through* representation and by converting itself *to* it. (24, s1).

Through this process of “conversion” to thinking-cognition, philosophy makes the “form of thought” that is implicit in these familiar but impure representations “appear” in the form of concepts (25). The aim of philosophy is thus to show how these familiar representations are but primitive “metaphors of thoughts,” so as to “make thoughts themselves into objects” (27). While lacking proper conceptual elaboration, representations have a determinate content insofar as thinking synthesizes the endowments of the different faculties as self-identical objects. For to the extent feelings, intuitions, or imaginings are said to have determinate contents they are given objectively as representations, which means already endowed with the form of thought, even if these are by definition associated with non-discursive states. (26, s3)

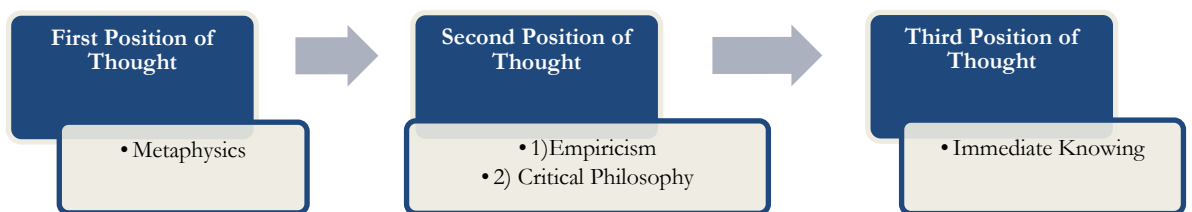
Philosophy cannot but begin from within the familiarity of these conceptually determined objects of representation that serve as its support; but by the same token it cannot demand a propaedeutic investigation into the faculty of cognition prior to having any cognition, a task which Hegel famously characterizes as analogous to “seeking to learn to swim before jumping in the water.” For Hegel, however, this does not entail the manifestly absurd thesis that critical philosophy could somehow take place before any kind of experience has taken place. Rather, it indicates that the very attempt to overcome dogmatism and salvage truth by philosophy cannot be done by demarcating the lines between transcendental and empirical discourse, or between condition and conditioned. In the next section, we show why Hegel thinks that critical philosophy must fail precisely in this task.

*b. The Absolutization of Contradiction as Conceptual Difference*

In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel situates Kant’s critical turn within a protracted, three stage periodization of Western philosophical history, as part of a “Preliminary Conception” for speculative logic. It comprises the second stage of the second “position of thought with regard to objectivity,” after the first position of thought identified with *metaphysics*, and after the first stage of the second position of thought, identified with *empiricism*. Simplifying to the extreme, while metaphysics aims to think of things-in-themselves directly as categorially

determinate beings, in empiricism these thought-determinations are understood as mediated by and items of experience. Yet in this relativization, empiricism also leveraged a central skeptical challenge to modal notions of necessity and consequence that furnished conceptions of identity and causality between substances in metaphysics, e.g. the permanent identity of the self, relations of cause and effect, etc.

Mediating the transition to immediate knowing, critical philosophy recovers the objective modal relations of necessity between determinate beings postulated by metaphysics, while salvaging the epistemological priority accorded to experiential mediation postulated by empiricism. In doing so, it seeks to show that these determinations are the products of *thought itself*, and not *given* from without i.e. the *categories* are neither directly apprehended in the *world*, nor extrapolated from *experience*, but constitute *a priori* structures of the pure understanding, on whose basis all empirical cognition of objects and their modal relations becomes possible.



This last formulation, however, reveals the lingering issue in the critical attempt to separate the transcendental from the empirical by way of a propaedeutic investigation into the faculty of cognition: it bears a residual *dogmatism* that it retains from classical metaphysics that vitiates its foundationalist pretensions, and it falls to a *subjectivism* that it shares with empiricism in relativizing necessity to the endowments of experience.<sup>4</sup> For just as the categories are themselves taken as *undervived* postulates inflecting the categorial structure of substance metaphysics to the facultative powers of the transcendental subject, so critical philosophy recovers necessity from the empiricist skeptical challenge

<sup>4</sup> In this regard, Hegel tells us, (dogmatic) metaphysics retains an element of truth beyond empiricism and even critical philosophy, insofar as it understands thought-determinations and their relations of contrariety/incompatibility as objective in the sense of applying to “things-themselves” (66).

against modality at the price of a transcendental skepticism, according to which all cognition must be circumscribed to the realm of appearances (phenomena) but not to things-in-themselves (noumena).

With this said, Hegel explains that critical philosophy harbors the latent insight required to move to the position of immediate knowing, and so to arrive at the “ground” for speculative logic. He draws a series of conceptual contrasts in which, as we shall see, the restricted ontological scope of *contradiction* is unearthed as the crucial shortcoming of the critical method:

1) *Finite vs Infinite Thought* – The determinations attributed to the objects of experience remain “one-sided” and so *finite* products of the *understanding*, endowed with fixed anti-theses, excluding contradiction from themselves. In contrast, for *infinite* thought, the Idea must relate all opposed finite determinations in their unity as *reason*, and to show the movement of determination as the unfolding of the Idea from itself in its pure, indeterminate immediacy.

If the thought-determinations are afflicted with a fixed antithesis, i.e., if they are only of a finite nature, then they are inadequate to the truth which is absolutely in and for itself, and the truth cannot enter into thinking. The thinking that brings forth only finite determinations and moves within these alone is called understanding (in the more precise sense of the word). (64).

2) *Traditional vs. Speculative Logic* - Thought-determinations continue to be metaphysically laden rather than derived from *thinking itself*. It was Fichte’s merit to insist upon the need of grounding not only the objective necessity, but the unity of the self as the indeterminate but determining kernel from which objective determinations were said to arise. For Kant, the deduction of the forms of synthesis upon which categorial judgments rest refer us to the pure “I” of transcendental apperception: a unifying agent whose acts of judgment comprise all possible objective determinations through which the understanding synthesizes the data of intuition.

So how are we to arrive at the determinations of the I, or at the categories? Fortunately, we can find the various kinds of judgment already specified empirically in the traditional logic. To judge, however, is to think a determinate object. So, the various modes of judgment that have

already been enumerated give us the various determinations of thinking.  
(84)

- 3) *Contradiction as Rational Limitation vs. Contradiction as Ontological Primitive* – The extrapolation of the categories to “unconditioned” *objects of reason* leads to pure reason overstepping its epistemic limits. Attempts to think consistently of the Soul, the world, and God, in accordance with the determinations of phenomenal appearances thus invariably leads to defects of reason.
- *The Paralogisms of the Soul* – When pure reason attempts to think of the determinations of the Soul it invariably falls to a fallacy of equivocation between the empirical and transcendental: the *permanence, incorruptibility, and personality* (empirical) of the soul are illegitimately inferred from its *substantiality, simplicity, and identity* (transcendental) (90). In turn, for Hegel, empirical determinations must not be separated from “transcendental” conditions; rather, all thought-determinations must be derivable from a pure indeterminate but self-determining instance.
  - *The Antinomies of the World* – When pure reason attempts to think of the determinations of the World it invariably falls to contradiction. But this delimitation of contradiction to the cosmological domain as a “defect of reason” expresses nothing but a “tenderness for things of the world.” In turn, for Hegel, antinomies and contradiction must be seen as inhering everywhere and in everything, already within the self-determining indeterminate instance, and by extension to every determination that follows from such an instance, including in thought within the realm of representations, concepts, and ideas.

The main point that has to be made is that antinomy is found not only in the four particular objects taken from cosmology, but rather in all objects of all kinds, in all representations, concepts, and ideas. To know this, and to be cognizant of this property of objects, belongs to what is essential in philosophical study; this is the property that constitutes what will determine itself in due course as the dialectical moment of logical thinking. (92)

Notice that in rendering contradiction ubiquitous in nature and spirit, the role of the dialectic in relation to philosophy is in turn also subject to a historical



transvaluation: *dialectic* is neither mere sophistry against philosophy, nor (as with Plato in the *Parmenides*) a purely *negative* exercise for philosophy designed to “refute limited assertions.” With Kant already, the dialectic had become a “necessary operation of reason,” but as we have seen it remains restricted to a regulatory task, reinforcing the limits of reason with regard to experience, as seen in its defective use when thinking of unconditioned objects (SOL: 34-35). For Hegel, the dialectic grasps contradiction as the unity of contraries as a *genetic principle*, that is, the progressive determination of the Idea in nature and spirit: “This result, *grasped* in its *positive aspect*, is nothing else but the inner negativity of the determinations which is their self-moving soul, the principle of all natural and spiritual life” (SOL: 35).

- *The Abstraction of God* – When pure reason attempts to think of God as infinite substance or as pure subject, the latter cannot but be conceived as a simple abstraction, incapable of explaining the generation of all determinations, and in this regard remains a “one-sided” conception, like the pure I of apperception. In turn, for Hegel, to think of the self-determination of the Idea by the movement of contradiction is also to think of substance as subject; a subject that is no longer transcendent but immanent to the determination of substance and of spirit alike.

The result from these three insights for speculative logic can be thus summarized in three principles:

(P1) *The Principle of Indeterminate Grounding* - The determinations provided by thought cannot be taken as given or innate, either directly apprehended in objects (metaphysics) or abstracted from experience (empiricism); the epistemic foundation for a pure logic must remain “presuppositionless,” and in this regard it must be pure or *indeterminate*.

(P2) *The Principle of Genetic Holism* - The indeterminate instance of grounding must constitute itself as a self-determining *active universality*, as opposed to a purely passive or abstract one that postulates finite relations of generality and particularity, cause and effect, from without.

(P3) *The Principle of Moving Contradiction* - Contradiction is productive rather than

a mere defect of reason, inhering ubiquitously in nature and spirit. It inheres already in the indeterminacy of the ground, as the motor for its self-determination.

Before assessing how these three principles set the speculative logic in motion, we should draw attention to one final conceptual contrast, through which Hegel grounds the transposition of contradiction to the world, while avoiding a kind of a *subjective idealism*: the distinction between *thoughts* and *thought-determinations*. In the first editorial Appendix to Section 24 of the *EL*, this distinction is used to explain how determinations can be *objective* in the sense of applying to things-in-themselves, outside of thought, while nevertheless *corresponding* to the contents of thought: while *thoughts* pertain to the discursive representings of conscious beings, *thought-determinations* concern the way that these predicative-discursive correspond to objects in the world. There is thus an isomorphy between thoughts and thought-determinations insofar as they are said of objects themselves, where the latter articulate nature as a “system of thought without consciousness”:

In this view we would have to talk about nature as a system of thought without consciousness, or an intelligence which, as Schelling says, is petrified in order to avoid misunderstanding, it is better to speak of “thought-determinations” instead of using the expression “thoughts”. (64)

## 1.2. - THE HEGELIAN THEATER – ABSOLUTE AND CONCEPTUAL DISTINCTION

In continuity with the three principles that we outlined above, the starting point of the logic must refer to an *indeterminate instance* (insofar as only such an instance does not presuppose any positive determination in advance) that is nevertheless *self-determining* (in the sense that, nevertheless, such an indeterminate it actively allows all positive determinations to be derived from it). And such a self-determining instance must establish that contradiction is the motor of self-determination, inhering already in and following from an unconditioned instance. This involves conceiving of the unconditioned and indeterminate foundation, in a way that is precisely not sterile, but an *active universality*, in which contradiction appears as the very motor of the dialectic, giving life to the Idea as the wellspring all determination in nature and spirit.

The first position of speculative logic corresponding to this indeterminate

universality is that of *being* “in general”: pure being as the *indeterminate immediate*.<sup>5</sup> It is *indeterminate*, Hegel tells us, since it is absolutely simple or “free of essence,” in that no predicate positively qualifies it. It is *immediate*, since it is not conceived in relation to an *other*, whether to another *being* or to *thought*.

The beginning must then be *absolute* or, what means the same here, must be an abstract beginning; and so there is *nothing* that it may *presuppose*, must not be mediated by anything or have a ground, ought to be rather itself the ground of the entire science. It must therefore be simply *an immediacy*, or rather only *immediacy* itself. Just as it cannot have any determination with respect to an other, so too it cannot have any within; it cannot have any content, for any content would entail distinction and the reference of distinct moments to each other, and hence a mediation. The beginning is therefore *pure being*. (SOL: 48)

In its indeterminacy, *being* is not yet *substance*, since it is qualitatively empty; but in its immediacy it is not yet *thought*, since it is irreflexive, and not defined in relation to a subject:<sup>6</sup>

Simple immediacy is itself an expression of reflection; it refers to the distinction from what is mediated. The true expression of this simple immediacy is therefore *pure being*. Just as pure knowledge should mean nothing but knowledge as such, so also pure being should mean nothing but *being* in general; *being*, and nothing else, without further determination and filling. (SOL: 47)

Since it lacks all determination, pure being is therefore a “non-being” or in any case “not-yet [determinate] being.” Insofar as it functions as a *foundation* for the logic, however, pure being corresponds to a “pure knowing,” one that

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<sup>5</sup> It is precisely insofar as it is indeterminate and immediate, enjoying no internal complexity any more than any relation to “an other,” Hegel argues, that “pure being” corresponds to a “pure knowing” (*das Unterschiedlose*), which coincides with the endpoint of the phenomenology of spirit in “absolute knowing”: the phenomenological result is a “pure knowledge” that is also the epistemic “ground” and beginning for the logic as a “pure science,” in which philosophy posits the unity of knowing with the known, thinking and its object, as the self-externalizing movement of the absolute idea: “*Logic* is the *pure science*, that is, pure knowledge in the full compass of its development. But in that result the idea has the determination of a certainty that has become truth; it is a certainty which, on the one hand, no longer stands over and against a subject matter confronting it externally but has interiorized it, is knowingly aware that the subject matter is itself; and, on the other hand, has relinquished any knowledge of itself that would oppose it to objectivity and would reduce the latter to a nothing; it has externalized this subjectivity and is at one with its externalization.” (47)

<sup>6</sup> In the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel defines mediation as follows: “mediation consists in having already left a first behind, to go on to a second, and in a going forth from moments that are distinct.”

dispenses, however, of any reference to a subject or act of thought. Accordingly, having effaced all reference to a constituting subject, such a pure knowing is also a non-knowing or not-yet knowing, just as pure being is a non-being or not yet being.

Pure knowledge, thus withdrawn into this unity, has sublated every reference to an other and to mediation; it is without distinctions and as thus distinctionless it ceases to be knowledge; what we have before us is only simple immediacy. (Ibid)

The proper contrary of pure being, Hegel tells us, is therefore not *nothing*, with which it is identical, but rather *determinate being*, to which it must pass: “Since it is immediate, it is being without quality; but the character of indeterminateness attaches to it in itself only in opposition to what is determinate or qualitative.” (58) But how is pure being to give way to determination and mediation; how is the indeterminate idea of “pure being” to function precisely as an active universality generates the wealth of thought-determinations corresponding to determinate beings?

It is precisely the identity of pure being with non-being that provides the rite of passage. For it is by postulating the *logical* indiscernibility between being and nothingness, while nevertheless preserving their *absolute* difference, that Hegel sets contradiction to work, and the dialectic in motion: being and nothing are *conceptually indiscernible* insofar as they both mutually imply each other as empty indeterminate immediacy; but they are *ontologically discernible*, insofar as being and nothing are nevertheless said to be “absolutely distinct” (*absolut unterschieden*).<sup>7</sup> Being and nothing are then, as Michael Rosen (1982) puts it, *non-identical indiscernibles*.<sup>8</sup> And it is because they are absolutely distinct that their conceptual indiscernibility expresses more than a tautology and syntactic difference, i.e. why the statement “being and nothing are the same” says more than “being and being are the same.”

This logical passage between *logically indiscernible absolute contraries* produces a new concept and figure of thought: that of *becoming*, understood as the “passing over” of being into nothing, and of nothing into being. Crucially, however, Hegel insists that being and nothing do not “pass over” into each other as two separate

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<sup>7</sup> Günther Maluschke (1974) puts this point by saying that the difference between being and nothing is “extra-logical”. See Maluschke (1974: 163).

<sup>8</sup> Rosen, Michael, *Hegel's Dialectic and its Criticism*, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 152.

instances, but “have passed over” into one another. Put differently, becoming attests to the *unity of absolute contraries*. In grasping this unity by way of conceptual indiscernibility, Hegel argues, their absolute difference “immediately” vanishes.<sup>9</sup>

But the truth is just as much that they are not without distinction; it is rather that *they are not the same*, that they are absolutely distinct yet equally unseparated and inseparable, and that *each immediately vanishes in its opposite* [*jedesin seinem Gegenteil verschwindet*]. Their truth is therefore this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one into the other: *becoming* [*das Werden*], a movement [*Bewegung*] in which the two are distinguished, but by a distinction which has just as immediately dissolved [*aufgelöst*] itself. (60)

Thinking registers the passage from the “pure intuition” of absolute difference to the unity of contraries by way of the conceptual indiscernibility and so logical identity between the two terms. This logical identity, does not erase absolute difference, but preserves it in thinking the unity of absolute contraries; the “movement” [*Bewegung*] of “dissolution” [*aufgelöst*] of one each term into the other. In short, thinking *conceptual* indiscernibility entails the *ontological* unity of absolute contraries, revealing the inherence of contradiction already in the indeterminate Idea of “pure being.”

But what is the criterion for absolute distinction invoked here, insofar as it “vanishes” yet persists in the unity of being and nothing? For if absolute difference was to vanish in the sense of being retroactively revealed as having been as a delusion of pre-philosophical representation, then conceptual identity could not designate any ontological difference, nor “movement” between distinct term. Absolute difference would collapse to a mere syntactic difference, and the statement “being and nothing are the same” would be reduced to an empty tautology.

Now, it is clear that the absolute difference between being and nothing cannot be conceptual, since it is not intelligible at the predicative level of thought-determinations. Hegel argues that while the cognition of being and nothing rest on a “pure intuition” of each term, the cognition of their absolute distinction rests an “ordinary assumption” that is, however, “unsayable.”

The *ordinary assumption* is that being is the absolutely other of nothing, and that there is nothing as clear as this absolute distinction; indeed, nothing seems easier than

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Theunissen (1980) famously points to the distinction between transition (*Übergehen*) and becoming (*Werden*) in Hegel’s terminology.

being able to state it. But it is just as easy to convince oneself that this is impossible, that the distinction is *unsayable*. *Let those who insist on the distinction of being and nothing, let them just try to state in what the distinction consists.* If being and nothing had any determinateness differentiating them, then, as we said, they would be determinate being and determinate nothing, not the pure being and the pure nothing which they still are at this point. (68)

Stephen Houlgate (2006) rehearses this moment in the Hegelian argumentation, and speaks of the “radical difference” between being and nothing as an “indeterminable” yet “evident” one:

They do not just constitute one and the same indeterminacy, therefore, but form two radically different indeterminacies whose difference is, however, indeterminable. The fact that being and nothing are indistinguishable in their immediate difference is evident in their immediate disappearance into one another. On the other hand, the fact that they are immediately different in their indistinguishability is evident in the immediate disappearance of each into the other. (265)

In explaining the “evidential” basis to think of absolute difference, Houlgate insists that Hegel’s claim that becoming is *unsayable* does not entail that becoming is somehow *unintelligible*; rather, “[w]hat he invites us to think is an irreducible difference that vanishes the moment it is thought—the moment it *is*— because it is simply immediate and indeterminate.” (Houlgate 2006: 270) Objecting to Günther Maluschke’s (1974) reading, according to which the absolute distinction between being and nothing is “extra-logical” and ultimately based on *opinion* (*Meinen*), Houlgate (2006) goes on to argue that absolute distinction must be understood as an “immediate logical difference”: one that is “meant” or “intuited,” and which “vanishes the very moment it is thought.” And indeed, Hegel himself points in this direction: it is *intention* that functions as the unstated criterion or “third element” that enables the thought of the unity of absolute contraries. In the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel furthermore refers to the *act of meaning something*, which is precisely contrasted with what is *sayable*:

But correct as it is to affirm the unity of being and nothing, it is equally correct to say that they are absolutely diverse too—that the one is not what the other is. But because this distinction has here not yet determined itself, precisely because being and nothing are still the immediate-it is, as belonging to them, what cannot be said, what is merely meant. (141)

It is clear, however, that *to mean* a difference cannot be identified at this stage with a gesture of ostensive reference; it cannot correspond to a “showing” in Wittgenstein’s sense, referring us back to experiential states or subjective acts. By the same token, to *intuit* absolute difference cannot be correlated to act of sensory intuition. Since pure being and nothingness are by definition immediate and indeterminate, it makes no sense to speak of an act of intuiting or meaning here. Hegel is aware of this, and in fact warns against an illegitimate appeal to a typology of subjective acts, since invoking intention as a “form of subjectivity” is strictly out of the question. It is rather *becoming itself* that is identified as the unsayable “third element” in which the unity of contraries is conceived.<sup>10</sup>

Their distinction is therefore completely empty, each is as indeterminate as the other; the distinction depends, therefore, not on them but on a third element, on *intention*. But intention is a form of subjectivity, and subjectivity does not belong to the present order of exposition. The third element in which being and nothing have their subsistence must however also be present here; and it is present indeed, it is *becoming*. In becoming, they are present as distinct; becoming only occurs to the extent that they are distinguished. This third is an other than they – they subsist only in an other, which is equivalent to saying that they do not subsist on their own. Becoming equally is the subsistence of being and of non-being; or their subsistence is only their being in a *one*; precisely this, their subsistence in a *one*, is that which equally sublates their distinction. (SOL: 68)

This line of argumentation is clearly circular, however; for if the unity of absolute contraries that *is becoming* only can only be thought *to the extent that being and nothing are already distinguished*, as Hegel tells us, then the question once again becomes what epistemic criteria allows us to grasp the absolute distinction between these two terms, so that the difference does not relapse to a syntactic one. Without such criterion, the “vanishing” yet preservation of absolute difference remains strictly unintelligible. As a result, the “ordinary assumption” that posits absolute difference would contaminate the alleged “pure intuition” that grounds speculative logic, delivering back to the confused deliverances of representation, only this time emptied of any positive content or criterion of

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<sup>10</sup> For this reason, it is not coherent to claim that the movement of becoming can be derived from the fact that, insofar as it is articulated in language, pure being must be implicitly mediated as *being thought*, and so imply its proper opposite: determinate being. This line of reading seeks to find already in the position of pure being as immediate the mediation of thought, and so the *existence* of the *cogito* as thinking being. See Brown (2021), ch. III.

identification. For what could a “pure intuiting” could amount to in any case, when thinking of the indeterminate immediacy of being and nothingness, and how could it serve as the foundation for anything like an ordinary “*assumption*” sufficient to play the epistemic role it presumes to?

In a series of Remarks that follow the derivation of becoming and the exposition of section 1.C.A, however, Hegel displaces the locus of his argumentation: the conceptual indiscernibility and absolute distinction between being and nothing in their immediate passing is now translated to the contradiction that obtains when affirming the truth of the identity *statement* “being and nothing are the same.” Since this claim distinguishes between the two terms that it identifies, Hegel argues, the proposition turns out to be intrinsically contradictory. But in its contradictory nature, it is *the proposition itself* that is now said to “have movement” and “vanish spontaneously,” where this vanishing movement is once again identified with the “proper content” of becoming.

Now, in so far as the proposition “being and nothing are the same” expresses the identity of these [non-]determinations, yet in fact equally contains the two as distinguished, it internally contradicts itself and thus dissolves itself. And if we concentrate on this result, what we have before us is a proposition which, on closer inspection turns out to vanish spontaneously. It has movement. But in thus vanishing, it is its proper content which comes to be in it, namely becoming. (SOL: 67)

Continuing the inflection to the dimension of the proposition, Hegel then indicates that the contradiction between the positive and negative identity statements “being and nothing are the same” and “being and nothing are not the same” reveals that absolute contraries are nevertheless “united absolutely.” For both claims are true yet contradictory, and so express “a union which can then only be said to be an unrest of simultaneous incompatibles, a movement.” (67).

This ‘union’ is not only a “true contradiction,” but grounds the *truth of the contradictory as such*, insofar as it installs itself at the heart of the indeterminate Idea. It appears to have the form a *paralogism*, but one that is positively ontologized rather than considered as a mere defect of reason, generalized beyond the cosmological domain to an intrinsic feature of *being in general*. Contradiction is thus positively affirmed, already in its indeterminate expression, and subsequently in all its determinations, as the Principle of Mobile Contradiction enjoins the speculative logician to do. In light of our exposition, however, the truth that Hegel



assigns to both positive and negative identity statements seems to rest on a fallacy of equivocation, closer in fact to an *antinomy* than to a *paralogism* in its logical form. For the sense in which being and nothing are said to be the same (conceptual) in both statements is *not* the same as the sense in which they are said to be different (ontological). And once the two senses of difference have been themselves distinguished, the contradiction dissolves:

1. Being and Nothing are *conceptually* the same.
2. Being and Nothing are *absolutely* distinct.

The obvious retort here is that the identity invoked in the statement “being or nothing are the same” cannot be reduced to mere conceptual indiscernibility. For it is the ontological unity of being and nothing as absolute contraries that the former reveals to thought; logical identity is also metaphysical identity for speculative logic. In displacing absolute difference to the proposition, however, it simply remains unclear just in what sense other than syntactic difference the terms “being” and “nothing” are supposed to be preemptively distinguished, and as a consequence the basis on which the truth of both positive and negative identity statements is supposed to be determined is obscure. Voided from any legitimate deferral to subjective act or mediation, and lacking any tractable conceptual content, appeals to a “showing” or “pure intuiting” remain unintelligible, and the “ordinary assumption” that grounds the thought of absolute distinction becomes just that: an assumption.

In the end, this is the epistemological predicament facing the Hegelian attempt to inscribe contradiction at the heart of being: the positive inscription of conceptual indiscernibility in the ontological unity of contraries supposes an unintelligible criterion of absolute difference, one that in fact presupposes the order of representation that it claims to leave behind. And without such a principle, the indeterminate immediacy of pure being and its conceptual indiscernibility with nothing gives only a sterile abstraction and stillborn beginning.

In the next section, we survey alternative account of the genesis of becoming, which proposes to positively define a criterion for non-conceptual difference as the real condition for conceptual difference. Such an account is explicitly

proposed as an authentic alternative to the ‘false theater’ of movement staged by the Hegelian dialectic and its conceptual realist reification of contradiction in favor of a structural realist account of difference and dialectic of Ideas.

## 2.1. DELEUZE’S CRITIQUE OF REPRESENTATION

### (a) *A Generalized Anti-Hegelianism*

As pronounced as his divergences with Hegel might be, Bergson’s philosophical program shares with Absolute Idealism the view that the difference between the for-us and the in-itself drawn by critical philosophy reduces the philosophical concept to a distorting sieve before the Absolute. Unlike the *idealist* dialectic, however, for Bergson, the Absolute is not intelligible as the movement of the Concept, but must be accorded a “psychological nature”: to access the Absolute requires a fundamental act of attunement through we “install ourselves directly” within the flux of becoming, understood as pure duration. Attending to the flux of conscious experience, philosophy must above all resist the tendency of the intellect to “conceive of the moving by means of the unmovable.” This is the task of a “superior empiricism” that identifies appearances with things-in-themselves, and rehabilitates metaphysics by way of a direct realism that undercuts the need for an epistemological propaedeutic.

[W]e must accustom ourselves to think being directly, without making a detour... Then the Absolute is revealed very near us and, in a certain measure, in us. It is of psychological and not of mathematical nor logical essence. It lives with us[...] Like us, but in certain aspects infinitely more concentrated and more gathered up in itself, it endures. But do we ever think true duration? Here again a direct taking possession is necessary. It is no use trying to approach duration: we must install ourselves within it straight away. This is what the intellect generally refuses to do, accustomed as it is to think the moving by means of the unmovable.<sup>11</sup>

In continuity with Bergson, Deleuze identifies the task of such a superior empiricism as that of producing a *science of the sensible*: an account of *real becoming* commensurate to thinking of *difference-in-itself* rather than *difference in the concept* (Deleuze 1994: 56-57). This does not imply, however, a regression to dogmatic metaphysics, nor a derogation of the transcendental method in a retreat to the

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<sup>11</sup> Bergson, Henri, *Introduction to Metaphysics: The Creative Mind*, translated by M.L. Anderson, 1975, pp. 123.

empiricist priority accorded to sensory givenness: it involves rather a *materialist* transvaluation of the transcendental idealism, and a *constructivist* transvaluation of classical empiricism. Contrasting the representational account of thinking and the subordination of real difference to conceptual identity, transcendental empiricism seeks to specify the conditions of *real* rather than *possible experience*, conditions that are “continuous” with and “adequate” what they determine.

The elementary concepts of representation are the categories defined as the conditions of possible experience. These, however, are too general or too large for the real. The net is so loose that the largest fish pass through. [...] Everything changes once we determine the conditions of real experience, which are not larger than the conditioned and which differ in kind from the categories. (68)

The derogation of categorial determination at the level of the concept is continuous with a derogation of representation. For Deleuze, however, and unlike Hegel, representation does not designate a lowly or confused form of thought that is to be superseded by the purity of the philosophical concept; it is rather the very perversion of the concept that peddles a distorting *model of thought*, reiterated throughout philosophical history, including and paradigmatically expressed by its absolute idealist iteration. Indeed, according to Deleuze, the Hegelian dialectic expresses but the “orgiastic” extreme of representation.

In order to think of the “being of the sensible” and the conditions of “real experience,” transcendental empiricism must accordingly identify and interrupt the constitutive operations through which the world of representation distorts becoming and experience. In its embryonic, Platonist iteration, Deleuze argues, representation subordinates *becoming to being* under the “form of the Same and the Similar,” according to the distinction between *copy* and the *model*. For Plato, this dualism is constitutive of a *selective* procedure, through which one discriminates between those appearances that resemble Ideas as models (*copies*) and those rabid appearances that escape all identification and similitude (*simulacra*). Such archetypical models are not only concepts or categories for entities or species, but institute a normative standard, distorting the reality of becoming under the assumed permanence of natural and moral laws. It occurs in two complementary steps which, while incipient in Plato, find their paradigmatic expression in the Aristotelian subsumption of being to *categorial* determinacy.

1. First, representation reduces *real difference* to *identity in the concept*, where

difference is conceived in terms of conceptual opposition, e.g., the difference in *species* between the concepts *mosquito* and *zebra* refers us to the *contrariety in the predicates* “is an insect” vs. “is a mammal.” Nevertheless, difference in the predicate at the level of species always supposes a common identity in the concept at the level of genera, with the categories as the highest genera, e.g. the difference between *mosquito* and *zebra* nevertheless suppose a common identity under the genus *animal*, and finally their common determination under the category *substance*, which subsumes all qualitatively determined entities.

2. Second, representation reduces *real repetition* to *generality outside the concept* under the “form of the Same,” where conceptually identical but numerically different individuals are distinguished on the basis of *perceptual resemblances*, e.g. in asserting “it is raining *again!*” one classifies a plurality of singular events under the general concept “raining” as *similar instances of the same kind*.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze lays the task of transcendental empiricism as that of thinking of *difference-in-itself* and *repetition-for-itself* as complimentary dimensions of an “inverted Platonism.” For just like difference is not reducible to predicative contrarieties, repetition is never the “return of the Same and the Similar,” but the return of *difference as such*: a “mad-becoming” proper to simulacra or pre-individual *singularities*, shorn of all qualitative and quantitative common measure. It is anticipated in Nietzsche’s conception of The Eternal Return, which elevates simulacra to the rank of things-in-themselves, but which can no longer be identified with Bergson’s *qualitative* flux of duration.

Returning is being, but only the being of becoming. The eternal return does not bring back ‘the same’, but returning constitutes the only Same of that which becomes. Returning is the becoming-identical of becoming itself [...] Repetition is the formless being of all differences, the formless power of the ground which carries every object to that extreme ‘form’ in which its representation comes undone. The ultimate element of repetition is the disparate [*disparis*], which stands opposed to the identity of representation. (41-57)

At the outset of *Difference and Repetition*, this “overturning of Platonism” is continuous with an “anti-Hegelianism” that rejects the subordination of *becoming*

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<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche writes, “Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept “leaf” is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects.”

to the movement of *contradiction*. For, as we indicated, absolute Idealism expresses but the orgiastic extreme of representation and its distortion of the nature of thought and real difference. The ontology of difference proposed by transcendental empiricism accordingly begins by subtracting the dialectic of Ideas from the gauntlet of conceptual difference, which is the same as subtracting becoming from contradiction and negativity.

The primacy of identity, however conceived, defines the world of representation. But modern thought is born of the failure of representation, of the loss of identities, and of the discovery of all the forces that act under the representation of the identical. The modern world is one of simulacra.

According to Deleuze, contradiction is consummated in the thought of the “infinitely large,” the self-exteriorization of the Idea that at the culmination of the dialectic swallows all difference, such that every difference turns out to be a conceptual difference, and all movement turns out to be conceptual movement. He credits Kierkegaard and Nietzsche for having diagnosed what he characterizes in the Hegelian dialectic as staging the “theater” of “false movement”:

Their objection to Hegel is that he does not go beyond false movement - in other words, the abstract logical movement of ‘mediation.’ They want to put metaphysics in motion, in action [...] It is not enough, therefore, for them to propose a new representation of movement; representation is already mediation. Rather, it is a question of producing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside of all representation: it is a question of making movement itself a work, without interposition; of substituting direct signs for mediate representations; of inventing vibrations: whirling, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind. (8)

Theatre is real movement, and it extracts real movement from all the arts it employs. This is what we are told: this movement, the essence and the interiority of movement, is not opposition, not mediation, but repetition. Hegel is denounced as the one who proposes an abstract movement of concepts instead of a movement of the Physis and the Psyche. Hegel substitutes the abstract relation of the particular to the concept in general for the true relation of the singular and the universal in the Idea. He thus remains in the reflected element of ‘representation’, within simple generality. He represents concepts instead of dramatizing Ideas: he creates a false theatre, a false drama, a false movement. (10)

With this said, as we have seen, Hegel does not only reify contradiction so as

to subordinate difference to the concept. Conceptual *indifference* becomes positivized as the vehicle to think of the unity of contraries, presupposing an unintelligible non-conceptual difference that cannot be understood conceptually but only in a pure “showing” or “meaning.” It is thus not only that contradiction swallows the entire world of difference and assimilates it to the order of the concept within the orgiastic representation of the “infinitely large”: at the ground of the dialectic, speculative logic relies on a non-conceptually tractable criterion of absolute distinction to think the unity of contraries, and with it ignites the motor of contradiction in the concept.

Could the answer then be to provide precisely what Hegel could not: a criterion of non-conceptual difference in terms of which the identities tracked by conceptual determinations can be understood as but abstract *results* of a dynamic, individuating process? This is precisely the kernel of the Deleuzian strategy, which requires mapping the operations through which representation functions, so as to interrupt its underlying assumptions within a new positive, ontological account.

(b) *The Image of Thought*

In the third chapter and conclusion of *Difference and Repetition*, representation is more precisely characterized within the coordinates of what he names the (dogmatic) “image of thought,” constituted by eight central “postulates” and four constitutive “illusions,” which jointly organize the history of philosophy since its inception.<sup>13</sup> In essence, the “dogmatic image” departs from a reification of *common sense*, according to the founding, *postulate of the principle*, i.e. the implicit presupposition that there is an organic relation between *thinking* and *truth* (*cogitatio natura universalis*) based on the “good will” of the thinker and the “upright nature” of thought (131-132). This concordance between thinking and truth leads to an elevation of common sense into a constitutive principle, which provides thinking with a specific model, that of *recognition*: It mobilizes, as we saw above, a principle of identity and distribution, where a self-same object is said to be recognized by a self-identical subject across different modalities, i.e. so that “the same” object

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<sup>13</sup> In addition, in the introduction Deleuze identifies representation with an “artificial blockage” by which the concept restricts its infinite comprehension and extends its extension, contrasting it with a “natural blockage” in which becoming as real repetition shatters all representation (12-17).

may be perceived, imagined, conceived, etc.

It is only in the fourth *postulate of the element of representation*, however, that the truth-preserving correlation between the Self and its Object is shown to rest upon four “transcendental illusions”: (1) first, the subordination of difference in thinking to *identity* in the unspecified concept by a universal subject and the harmonious operation of the faculties (the distribution of the form of *the Same*); (2) second, the subordination of difference in sensibility to *resemblance* in the object of perception (the distribution of the form of *the Similar*); (3) third, the subordination of difference in the Idea to *negativity* as contrariety in the predicate (the distribution of the form of *the Opposed*); (4) fourth, the subordination of difference in Being to *analogy* in judgment, where the categories or highest genera determine and distribute the derivative opposition between species (the distribution of the form of *the Analogous*).

As should be evident, the postulates that organize image of *thought* are not reducible to an *epistemological* account of *thinking* as a “mirror of nature,” but also constitute a *metaphysical* account concerning the articulation of the subject of experience and its world: *sensibility* as the ordering of qualitative resemblances and quantitative equivalences, of *Ideas* as propositional differentiated by conceptual oppositions marshalled by the powers of negativity, and of *being* as categorially determined and analogically distributed in the system of judgment.<sup>14</sup> A genuinely *modern* philosophy must therefore testify to the failure of representation: “We propose to think difference in itself independently of the forms of representation which reduce it to the Same, and the relation of different to different independently of those forms which make them pass through the negative.” (xiv)

## 2.2. THE DELEUZEAN THEATER: STRUCTURE AND DIFFERENCE

Deleuze’s suspension of representation in an account of becoming as non-

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<sup>14</sup> The last four postulates explain how the image of thought distorts the nature of thought by a misunderstanding of language: reifying *error* as the only form of cognitive dysfunction and negativity as the motor of becoming (“postulate of the negative”); the assimilation of sense to logical signification (“the postulate of logical function”); the priority of solutions over problems (“the postulate of modality”); and the prioritizing of knowledge over learning (“postulate of the end”). We do not undertake an exposition of each of these aspects here.

conceptual difference involves a transvaluation of the transcendental aesthetic in an account of intensities that communicate with each other in heterogenous series, and a transvaluation of the transcendental dialectic in an account of Ideas that displaces the dialectic between reality and appearances in terms of the relation between *problems* and *solutions*. First, against the *postulate of modality* in the image of thought, Ideas are neither propositional states nor concepts, and relations between Ideas are not intelligible in terms of predicative contraries marshalled by the powers of the negative (170). Rather, Ideas are “problematic multiplicities” that are *structurally* understood as having both an “objective value” and genetic power: they are not the conditions of *possible experience* but the *virtual conditions* of *material actuality*. For as Deleuze argues, in forgetting the “ideal objectivity of the problematic,” at its limit with Hegel’s idealism, representation transposes contradiction and so conceptual opposition into the world as such, idealizing the latter.

[W]henver the dialectic ‘forgets’ its intimate relation with Ideas in the form of problems, whenever it is content to trace problems from propositions, it loses its true power and falls under the sway of the power of the negative, necessarily substituting for the ideal objectivity of the problematic a simple confrontation between opposing, contrary, or contradictory propositions. This long perversion begins with the dialectic itself, and attains its extreme form in Hegelianism. (164)

Following Leibniz, while seeking to free the latter from its residual theological assumptions, Deleuze considers the differential calculus as providing the resources for a reworked *aesthetic of intensities* and *dialectic of Ideas* that provides the basis for a formal ontology that explains becoming across all “orders” of empirical individuation: from the physical to the biological, from the linguistic to the socio-economic, etc. Indeed, the articulation between Ideas and intensities concerns the correspondence between structure and materiality in a reworked account of synthesis: no longer that between concept and intuition, but that between virtual Ideas and intensive difference.

In sketching the contours for this new “differential philosophy” Deleuze draws from a genealogy of “esoteric” philosophical interpretations of the differential calculus, which preserve its *genetic* ambitions against those “finitist” interpretations associated with set-theory and structuralism. More precisely, Deleuze illustrates how the dimensions of *quantity*, *quality*, and *potentiality* become successively “purified” from their conceptual envelopment in three “principles”



of differential philosophy:

(PI) *The Principle of Determinability* - the *element* of the *differential*: the symbol for the differential,  $\delta x$ , designates difference or continuity, also described as the “intensive factor” constituting the indeterminate but determinable *element* of the Idea.

(PII) *The Principle of Reciprocal Determination* - the *relations* between differential elements: in  $\delta y/\delta x$ , the differential elements are said to be determinable in relation to each other. These differential relations in the Idea establish a “symbolic field of solvability,” that correspond to the intensive “field of individuation” filled by spatio-temporal dynamisms.

(PIII) *The Principle of Complete Determination* - the *values* of the relation  $\delta y/\delta x$  are said to be completely determined by the distribution of *singular points*, on whose basis the Idea fixes a “field of individuation” onto every possible and actual point. (175-176). The convergence of heterogenous series dependent on singular points constitute a *continuum*, on whose basis the totality of vectors actualization that compose a *world* are determined.

Idea	Principle	Object
Indeterminate	Principle of Determinability $(\delta y, \delta x)$	Quantitativity (Element)
Determinable	Principle of Reciprocal Determination ( $\delta y/\delta x$ )	Qualitativity (Relation)
Determined	Principle of Complete Determination (singular values of $\delta y/\delta x$ )	Potentiality (Singularity)

These three principles and their respective objects describe problematic Ideas as having a *virtual structure*: they are in themselves *real* without being *actual*, defining a “problematic field” irreducible to the “solutions” to which they give rise. Ideas are finally conceived as having a *structural* being:

The virtual is not opposed to the real but to the actual. The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual. [...] The reality of the virtual consists of the differential elements and relations along with the singular points which correspond to them. The reality of the virtual is structure. We must avoid giving the elements and

relations that form a structure an actuality which they do not have, and withdrawing from them a reality which they have. (208-209)

The dialectical nature of Ideas, however, “points beyond” mathematics to different *orders* of “varieties” of the problematic, comprising different “symbolic fields of solvability” and ontic “regions” of individuation, i.e. physical Ideas, biological Ideas, sociological Ideas, linguistic Ideas, literary Ideas, etc. (179) In this sense, more than a field belonging to mathematical theorization, the differential calculus enjoys a universal status in distinguishing the different *orders* of “variety” in the Idea, which are embedded and related with each other. Generalizing the concepts and formalisms of the calculus into a structural realist ontology, Deleuze defines the structure of Ideas as *differentiable manifolds*: as “*n*-dimensional, continuous, defined, multiplicity,” unpacking these characteristics as follows:

By dimensions, we mean the variables or co-ordinates upon which a phenomenon depends; by continuity, we mean the set of relations between changes in these variables - for example, a quadratic form of the differentials of the co-ordinates; by definition, we mean the elements reciprocally determined by these relations, elements which cannot change unless the multiplicity changes its order and its metric. (182-183)

The wedge between intensities and Ideas reminds us to the “element” of Idea or differential, considered as the “intensive factor” belonging to “field” of pre-individual singularities within the intensive *spatium*, a state of pure indeterminacy prior to any individuating movement or relational articulation. Even if these elements are not yet structured into a problematic field in which individuation takes place, they nevertheless remain minimally structured insofar as they are understood as singularities distributed within the ur-spatial intensive “field.” A serial genesis of sensibility and thought then articulates the aesthetic of intensity and the dialectic Ideas, organizing a fourfold “order of reasons” (251): first, as we have seen, pure intensity is correlated to a state of indeterminate but fully differentiated pre-individual singularities composing the intensive spatium; second, intensities are individuated into spatio-temporal dynamisms as heterogenous series of singularities communicate within each other, composing a “field of individuation/solvability,” determining the differential relations in the

Idea; third, the becoming of spatio-temporal dynamisms leads to the dramatisation that progressively determines Ideal problems and their variable values; finally, completely determined Ideas are actualized as individuated intensities are differentiated: intensity is explicated as qualities and extensities, and virtual Ideas become actualized in species and parts.

But how do these “mad-becomings” give rise to Ideas, initiating intensive individuation? How does transcendental empiricism pass from the chaotic flux of pure intensity, indiscernible from the sterile inertia of pure being, so that it can indeed give rise to the wealth of differences that we *conceptually* identify in terms of the orders and varieties of “the Idea,” and its actual “results”? Once more, it is the passage to determinate being from indeterminacy that shrouds the mystery of difference, even as the latter is identified with inchoate madness.

The catalysis of spatio-temporal dynamisms within a problematic space of virtual Ideas is indexed the “invisible and imperceptible” mediation of what Deleuze names *the dark precursor*: the “differentiator of difference” or individuating factor, responsible for the communication between heterogenous orders of intensive differences. If the consistency of a *compossible world* is generated by the convergence of series or continuum of singularities, then the dark precursor functions as the aleatory point or element on whose basis heterogenous series of intensities-singularities interact. It eludes identification other than by its systemic effects, characterized in itself simply as a problem-solving engine or ‘paradoxical element,’ encompassing all orders of variety in the Idea. It is identified structurally in informational and semiotic terms: as forming a “signal-sign system,” resulting from the ‘adjunction’ and ‘condensation’ of fields of pre-individual singularities articulating heterogenous intensive series, whose ‘communication’ give rise to spatio-temporal dynamisms. These dynamisms are “signs” or “phenomena” that “flash” within the system between series, generating a “forced movement” through which all “individuation” takes place (244-246). The dark precursor is itself *the disparate*: the sufficient reason for both the individuation of intensities and the determination of Ideas.

Given two heterogeneous series, two series of differences, the precursor plays the part of the differentiator of these differences [...] We call this dark precursor, this difference in itself or difference in the second degree which relates heterogeneous systems and even completely disparate things, the disparate. (117-119)

The informational exchange carried by the “dark precursor” involves a creative agency proper to an inhuman form of transcendental subjectivity: the *larval subject*, giving rise to the three syntheses of time and of the psyche, in a double genesis of being and thinking: from the constitution of the living present by the syntheses of habit, to the articulation of virtual past by the syntheses of memory, to the return of the virtual past to the wellspring of pure difference in the generation of the future by the syntheses of pure time. Such an account of synthesis and larval subjectivation in turn supposes a reworked doctrine of the faculties. Against representation and the transcendental idealist framework, however, the faculties do not harmoniously subsume objects under the form of the Same and the Similar, but have their unique proper object that forces the other in a serial manner: the *sentiendum* for transcendental sensibility, the *memorandum* for transcendental memory, the *cogitandum* for thought. The catalysis of individuation begins with the “encounter” with the *sentiendum* by transcendental sensibility, which is “the being of the sensible,” shocking the subject and serially initiating a process that culminates in the production of Ideas by thought with the *cogitandum*. A “serial violence” takes us from sensibility to thought, from pure intensity to Ideas.

The intensive factors of individuation take themselves as objects in such a manner as to constitute the highest element of a transcendent sensibility, the *sentiendum*; and from faculty to faculty, the ground is borne within thought - still as the unthought and unthinking, but this unthought has become the necessary empirical form in which, in the fractured I [...] thought at last thinks the *cogitandum*. (153)

The para-sense or violence which is communicated from one faculty to another according to an order then assigns a particular place to thought: Thought is determined in such a manner that it grasps its own *cogitandum* only at the extremity of the fuse of violence which, from one Idea to another, first sets in motion sensibility and its *sentiendum*, and so on. This extremity might just as well be regarded as the ultimate origin of Ideas. (193-194)

At this point, however, the articulation between intensity and Ideas becomes troubled by the tension between empiricism and constructivism. For the catalysis of individuation and formation of virtual Ideas and their intensive factors acquires an ambiguous status within Deleuze’s methodology. Disqualifying any appeals to givenness, each transcendental faculty is said to *produce* rather than *represent* or *intuit* its distinctive object. This means that the *sentiendum* must be likewise

produced by transcendental sensibility in order to be “encountered” and shock the subject.

The paradox of transcendental sensibility is thus that it must encounter what it itself produces: intensity, or the being of the sensible. But, as we have seen, already prior to the synthesizing labor of thought, intensity is already idealized in structural terms as the “element of the differential,” corresponding to those “mad-becomings” or pre-individual singularities populating the intensive *spatium*. Undercutting the *epistemological* scope of transcendental investigation, the ontological generalization of the calculus and differential manifolds depends on metaphysical hypostasis, by virtue of which a series of formalisms are transposed into a generic typology of “varieties” in the Ideas and different “orders” of individuation. This means that *non-conceptual difference in the Idea at the structural level supposes conceptual differences at the level of their orders and varieties*. But at a loss for anything like a transcendental “deduction,” the coordination between specific mathematical formalisms and the ontological categories used to interpret the former within a metaphysical framework depends on nothing but an arbitrary selection of base *theoretical* registers, formal methods, and an equally arbitrary *categorization* provided by philosophy. Having eliminated the mediating role of the transcendental analytic *vis a vis* the aesthetic and dialectic, and with no of epistemological criteria to adjudicate the “correspondence” between formalisms, concepts, and the world, it is just anyone’s guess what could possibly verify the “adequation” between condition and conditioned that transcendental empiricist *concepts* have to the world of difference that it describes.

Of course, Deleuze is not unaware of this potential line of objection. Just as the difference between representing and represented becomes displaced in terms of the continuous relation between virtual Idea its actual solutions by way of an account of individuating difference, so the difference between a theory and what it describes must be understood as but a peculiar kind of Ideal-genesis at the structural level: the *creation of concepts*. Explaining the “superiority” of the transcendental empiricist method as involving a “creation of concepts” which heeds to what is “given to experience,” at the outset of *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze strangely makes a primitive appeal to the “encounter” as the being of the sensible: not only guaranteeing the “measure of fit” between the intensive noumenon given to transcendental sensibility and the thinking of the larval

subject, but also the correspondence between the *concepts* and the *objects* conceived by empiricist philosophy.

Empiricism is by no means a reaction against concepts, nor a simple appeal to lived experience. On the contrary, it undertakes the most insane creation of concepts ever seen or heard. Empiricism is a mysticism and a mathematicism of concepts, but precisely one which treats the concept as object of an encounter, as a here-and-now, or rather as an Erewhon from which emerge inexhaustibly ever new, differently distributed ‘heres’ and ‘nows.’ (XX)

Acting as both the producer and experiencer of concepts, “even the philosopher is a larval subject of his system.” (119)<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, as we have seen, it is unclear in what sense Deleuze’s constructivist methodology can make sense of an “encounter” with the being of the sensible, if the latter is precisely produced by the larval subject and not given in experience. It is even less clear still how “the encounter” with intensity can serve anything like a foundational or *epistemic* role for philosophical theorization: ruling out an idealism that claims that theory creates the world it theorizes, how transcendental empiricism can ever obviate a *representational* account of thinking which “reflects” upon difference as its domain of investigation becomes therefore unintelligible.

This means that, despite his aversion to representation and the reduction of real difference to conceptual identity, the structural realist characterization of the world of “difference-in-itself” depends on a metaphysical inflation of the calculus by the philosophical concept, drawing all forms of analogies to the representational function of discursive cognition. Indeed, it is only by drawing an explicit analogy with *practical reasoning* that Deleuze can characterize the agency of larval subjects in terms of “a problem-solving dynamic,” encompassing every theoretical and descriptive register: from the microphysical to the literary. And since transcendental empiricism is after all a *metaphysical theory*, then these semantic valences must purport to conceptually represent the world of non-conceptual difference, a task which however drawing arbitrary analogies the calculus can assume the theoretical role it does, as a generic ontology of pure

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<sup>15</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze relates this “mathematism of concepts” to a genealogy in the history of mathematics: while royal mathematics is emblemized by the “algebraic” set-theoretical (extensional) conception of multiplicity and the axiomatic method, while problematics is emblemized by the differential calculus, and more broadly to its “dialectical” expression across different dialectical-scientific orders. See Deleuze and Guattari (363).

difference and morphogenesis.

#### CONCLUSION – BECOMING BETWEEN CONCEPTUAL AND STRUCTURAL REALISM

The line of thought we have been following suggests the inescapability of representation when pursuing a non-dogmatic metaphysical account, even in its structuralist guise. For conceptual identity must seal non-conceptual difference in order to be anything other than an empty appeal to intuition or a formalism with no ontological or *theoretical* purchase. As Adorno already had argued, conceptual difference can only be interpreted as the motor of becoming insofar as it supposes an implicit criterion of non-conceptual difference or pure representing that remains underived. But from our exposition, and by the same token, we see that any account of non-conceptual difference can only be anything other than blunt mysticism by being conceptually interpreted in relation to specific semantic and theoretical valences. Supplementing Adorno, we can say thus that if conceptual difference must rely on non-conceptual difference in order to relate to the world, an appeal to non-conceptual difference must likewise must be conceptually enveloped for it not to thwart its minimal intelligibility, and not relapse into an empty abstraction, as Hegel's account of absolute distinction does in deferring to a "pure intuiting" or unsayable "showing."

This inextricability between the conceptual and the non-conceptual suggests that the exclusionary opposition between the structural-formal and the semantic-conceptual must be abandoned. The task is not only understanding how the conceptual relates to the non-conceptual, but rather to theorize how the formal and semantic dimensions of discourse interact so as to precisely assume an ontological role. The complementarity between conceptual and structural realism entails that it is not a matter of distinguishing between the dimension of formal structure and conceptual content, conflating the former with the ontological against the perversions of the latter. Rather, it is a matter of producing a more capacious and rigorous understanding of structure and of conceptual representation sufficient to understand the relation between mathematics, language, and the world: how do *semantic-conceptual* and *formal-mathematical structures* relate to *ontological structures*, whatever the latter turn out to be, in the last instance? In other words, we must think of the *structure of the conceptual*, in relation to which formal structures can precisely assume a theoretical or explanatory

function, without which the very possibility of ontology as a discourse becomes plainly unintelligible. As Lorenz Puntel (2008) argues, without being *semantically* correlated to the modally rich statements or *propositional structures* that define the theoretical scope and model-languages corresponding to specific *domains of interpretation*, mathematical-logical formal *structures* remain explanatorily mute, *uninterpreted abstract structures* with no content.

Within or by means of theoretical frameworks, contents are available for theorization, but this presupposes that the theoretical frameworks include elements that are not purely formal, but instead contain interpretations (i.e., relations to contents). For this reason, every philosophical or scientific theoretical framework contains, in addition to purely formal elements and concepts, also material or contentual ones. (24)

It is therefore insufficient to appeal ‘subtract’ difference from the order of conceptual identity by way of an account of Ideas as problematic multiplicities rather than propositional states, or to privilege the sensible in an account of the “encounter” that however relinquishes appeals to givenness. We must interrogate the articulation between sensibility in its receptive and productive dimensions, thinking in its conceptual and formal dimensions, and reality in its dynamic and stable dimensions. This involves not only preserving the autonomy of epistemological theorization in its propaedeutic role with regard to metaphysics, but indeed of semantic and methodological considerations as conditioning the very understanding of the tasks and roles of theorization in general, and ontological theorization in particular. Only then can philosophy claim to have relinquished at once the idealist, skeptical limitations before the absolute, without thereby relapsing into a dogmatism that elides rather than obviates the task to explain the difference and possible coordination between the subject and the world to which it belongs.

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