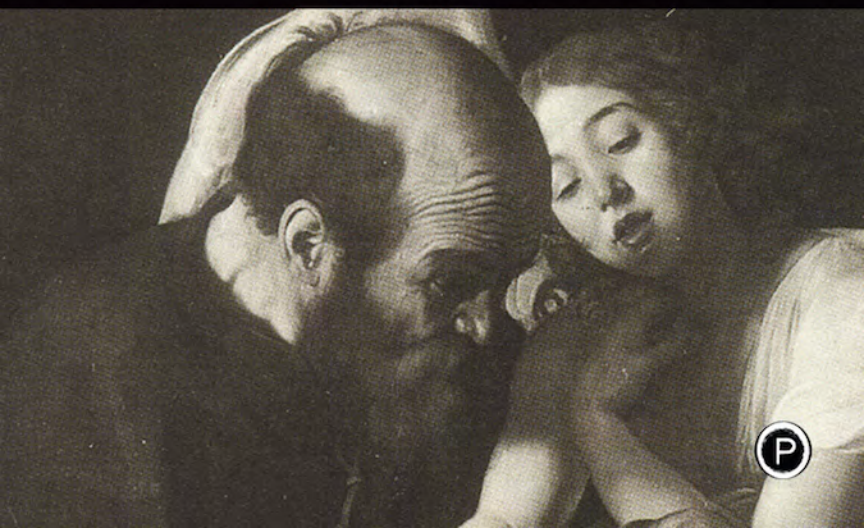




The Communism of Thought

Michael Munro



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dead letter office

BABEL Working Group

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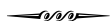


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§I: HOW TO READ

1.

“Reading is first and foremost non-reading.” That is to say, “non-reading is not just the absence of reading. It is a genuine activity”: “There is more than one way not to read, the most radical of which

is not to open a book at all. For any given reader, however dedicated he [*sic*] might be, such total abstention necessarily holds true for virtually everything that has been published, and thus in fact this constitutes our primary way of relating to books. We must not forget that even a prodigious reader never has access to more than an infinitesimal fraction of the books that exist.

“Even in the case of the most passionate life-long readers,” Pierre Bayard insists, “the act of picking up and opening a book masks the countergesture that occurs at the same time: the involuntary act of *not* picking up and *not* opening all the other books in the universe.”

If reading is, indeed, “first and foremost” non-reading, and if it is true that non-reading is “a genuine activity,” is there not perhaps, by the same token, a yet more radical—a more uncanny—way not to read? What of that non-reading, namely, at work in any given act of reading? What of that incomprehension, provisional yet indispensable, that elliptical illegibility, in other words, operative in every word that is read? After what fashion, if any, may it in turn be given to be read? And what could possibly be read by way of it?

2.

Reading is situated beyond comprehension or short of comprehension. . . . There is something dizzying about reading, or at least about the outset of reading, that resembles the irrational impulse by which we try to open eyes that are already closed, open them to life; this impulse is connected to desire, which is a leap, an infinite leap, just as

inspiration is a leap: I want to read what has nevertheless not been written.

~Maurice Blanchot

To read what was never written—that is philosophy’s first word and its last.

According to Giorgio Agamben, “the genuine philosophical element in every work, whether it be a work of art, of science, or of thought,

is its capacity for elaboration, which Ludwig Feuerbach defined as *Entwicklungsfähigkeit*. It is precisely when one follows such a principle that the difference between what belongs to the author of a work and what is attributable to the interpreter becomes as essential as it is difficult to grasp.

Daniel Heller-Roazen has written a beautiful gloss of that passage.

Between a work and its commentary, there is always an interval. It may consist of a historical removal, the temporal distance that separates a written thing from one that later seeks to explain it. But the interval need not be merely chronological in nature. Its pre-

sence can also be detected in the blanker regions of a single page: the typographical spaces that divide a major text from the lesser ones that, beneath or beside it, aim to clarify its argument. The border is, in any case, decisive. It belongs to the essence of the commentary to come into being at the outermost edges of a work and to move in the areas that at once surround and do not coincide with it. This fact follows from the nature of the form and can be easily ascertained. If an explanation were without relation to that which it aimed to explain, it would obviously be none at all; but if, by contrast, it were truly a part of that which it aimed to clarify, it would be equally impossible to distinguish it as such. A commentary always moves in the narrow regions that wind around the work upon which it bears, following and tracing its contours, and no matter how distant or how close to its text it may seem, an exposition never seeks either to leap beyond it or to venture within it. As its classical name indicates with a clarity that leaves little room for comment, the *commentum* stays at every point 'with' that upon

which it comments. In the realm of texts, it is an eternal accompanist, a permanent resident of the shifting space of being 'with' (*cum*). It lives nowhere if not in company: were it ever forced to be, so to speak, without its 'with,' it would not be at all.

For the greater part of its history, philosophy has been a practice of commentary, and it has conceived its most brilliant inventions at the edges of the corpus it has continued to accompany. Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages are perhaps the most illustrious cases, periods of the proliferation of glosses, expositions, and paraphrases (to say nothing of annotated editions and indexes) of all kinds. It is a truism that the thinkers of these epochs regularly departed from the theses of the tradition and, more precisely, from those stated *in littera* by the one who was for them the Philosopher par excellence. But such a claim means little as long as it leaves unspecified the role played by the encounter with 'tradition' in such a setting. The commentators of late Antiquity, the *falāsifa* and *filosofim* of classical Arabic culture, and the doctors of

the Latin Middle Ages may well all have conjoined their inquiries, in differing ways, to those of the authorities of Antiquity. The fact remains: more than once, they received from the classics something other than what had been transmitted to them. It followed from the nature of their craft. Glossators and their kind are incessantly in search of the animating element in their textual objects that bears no name: the dimension in them that, remaining unsaid, demands in time to be exposed. Thinkers trained as readers, the philosophers of the tradition were no exception. They knew how to find the secret source of incompleteness sealed in every work of thought, and they knew, too, how to draw from it the matter of their art.

Reading is an art, and non-reading a genuine activity, when reading passes wholly into non-reading and what was never written comes to light in what is read.

§ *“To come to light”*: In *“What is the Contemporary?”* Agamben cites an explanation for the darkness of the night sky derived from contemporary astrophysics. *“In the firmament that we ob-*

serve at night, the stars shine brightly, surrounded by a thick darkness. Since the number of galaxies and luminous bodies in the universe is almost infinite, the darkness that we see in the sky is something that, according to scientists, demands an explanation": "In an expanding universe, the most remote galaxies move away from us at a speed so great

that their light is never able to reach us. What we perceive as the darkness of the heavens is this light that, though traveling toward us, cannot reach us, since the galaxies from which the light originates move away from us at a velocity greater than the speed of light.

What comes to light—here—other than the pathos of light's absence? What is marked by black font on a white page other than our implication in something that, perpetually approaching us, must remain perpetually beyond our grasp?

3.

To read what was never written finds its corollary and completion in the injunction to write what will never be read.

Notes

Pg. 1: How to Read “If we are interested in the ways in which a text may be trying to become something other than what its author and even readers intend and expect, we need a metaphysics of reading, and also of the texts themselves.” Eileen A. Joy, “Like Two Autistic Moonbeams Entering the Window of My Asylum: Chaucer’s *Griselda* and Lars von Trier’s *Bess* McNeill,” *postmedieval* 2.2 (2011): 325 [316–328].

Pg. 1: Reading is first and foremost Pierre Bayard, *How to Talk About Books You Haven’t Read*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 6.

Pg. 1: non-reading is not just Bayard, *How to Talk About Books*, 12.

Pg. 1: There is more than one way Bayard, *How to Talk About Books*, 1.

Pg. 2: Even in the case Bayard, *How to Talk About Books*, 6. Author’s emphasis.

Pg. 2: that incomprehension [...] operative For the dizziness of that incomprehension, its

temporality, see *The Time That Remains*, where Agamben elaborates linguist Gustave Guillaume's concept of "operational time": "According to Guillaume, the human mind experiences time, but it does not possess the representation of it, and must, in representing it,

take recourse to constructions of a spatial order. It follows that grammar represents verbal time as an infinite line comprised of two segments, past and future, separated by the cutting of the present:

past	present	future
------	---------	--------

This representation, which Guillaume even calls a time-image, is inadequate precisely because it is too perfect. It presents time as though it were always already constructed, but does not show time in the act of being constructed in thought. In order to truly understand something, Guillaume says, considering it only in its constructed or achieved state is not enough; you also have to represent the phases through which thought had to pass constructing it.

Every mental operation, however quick, has to be achieved in a certain time, which, while short, is no less real. Guillaume defines ‘operational time’ as *the time the mind takes to realize a time-image*. An astute study of linguistic phenomena shows that languages do not organize their own verbal systems according to the previous linear schema (whose defect lies in its being too perfect), but rather by referring the constructed image back to the operational time in which it is constructed. In this way, Guillaume is able to complicate the chronological representation of time by adding a projection in which the process of forming the time-image is cast back onto the time image itself. In doing so, he comes up with a new representation of time, that of chronogenetic time, which is no longer linear but three-dimensional.

Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 65-66. Author’s emphasis.

Pg. 2: Reading is situated beyond comprehension Maurice Blanchot, *The Station Hill*

Blanchot Reader, ed. George Quasha, trans. Lydia Davis, Paul Auster, and Robert Lambertson (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1999), 434.

Pg. 2: There is something dizzying Blanchot, *The Blanchot Reader*, 433. Author's emphasis.

Pg. 3: To read what was never written Daniel Heller-Roazen, editor's introduction, in Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1 [1-23]: "Among the notes and sketches for Walter Benjamin's last work, the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,'

we find the following statement: 'Historical method is philological method, a method that has as its foundation the book of life. "To read what was never written," is what Hofmannsthal calls it. The reader referred to here is the true historian.' [...] What does it mean to confront history as a reader, 'to read what was never written'? And what is it that 'was never written' in the 'book of life'? The question concerns the event that Benjamin throughout his works calls 'redemption.'

“It is in this moment”—what Heller-Roazen identifies as “a messianic moment of thinking”—“that the past is saved, not in being returned to what once existed but, instead, precisely in being transformed into something that never was: in being read, in the words of Hofmannsthal, as what was never written.” See also, section 153 of Theodor Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*, “Finale”:

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects—this alone is the task of thought. It is the simplest of all things, because the situation calls imperatively for such knowledge, indeed because consummate negativity, once squarely faced,

delineates the mirror-image of its opposite. But it is also the utterly impossible thing, because it presupposes a standpoint removed, even though by a hair's breadth, from the scope of existence, whereas we well know that any possible knowledge must not only be first wrested from what is, if it shall hold good, but is also marked, for this very reason, by the same distortion and indigence which it seeks to escape. The more passionately thought denies its conditionality for the sake of the unconditional, the more unconsciously, and so calamitously, it is delivered up to the world. Even its own impossibility it must at last comprehend for the sake of the possible. But beside the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters.

Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), 247.

Pg. 3: philosophy's first word and its last Eric Dietrich, "There is No Progress in Philosophy," *Essays in Philosophy* 12.2 (2011): 329–344.

Pg. 3: the genuine philosophical element
 Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, trans. Luca D'Isanto and Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 7-8.

Pg. 3: Between a work and its commentary
 Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archeology of a Sensation* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 79-80.

Pg. 6: In the firmament that we observe at night
 Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?: And Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 46.

Pg. 7: comes to light—here Were that “light” to reach us, in other words, the page that staged its arrival would be blank.

In our house, this enormous suburban house, a rented barracks overgrown with indestructible medieval ruins, there was proclaimed today, on a misty, icy winter morning, the following call to arms: “Fellow Tenants, I possess five toy guns. They are hanging in my closet, one on each hook. The first is mine, the rest are for any-

one who wants them. Should there be more than four, the others will have to bring their own weapons and deposit them in my closet. For there will have to be unity; without unity we will not move forward. Incidentally, I only have guns which are entirely useless for any other purpose, the mechanism is ruined, the wads are torn off, only the hammers still snap. Therefore, it will not be very difficult to procure more such weapons should they be needed. But fundamentally, I will be just as happy, in the beginning, with people who have no guns. Those of us who do, will, at the crucial moment, take the unarmed into our midst. This is a strategy which proved itself with the first American farmers against the Indians; why shouldn't it prove itself here as well, since the conditions are, after all, similar. We can even forget about guns, then, for the duration, and even the five guns are not absolutely necessary, and they will be used simply because they are already here. If the other four do not want to carry them, then they can forget about them. I alone will carry one, as the leader. But we shouldn't have a leader, and so I, too,

will destroy my gun or lay it aside.” That was the first call to arms. In our house no one has the time or desire to read such calls, much less consider them. Soon the little papers were swimming along in the stream of dirt which originates in the attic, is nourished by all the corridors and spills down the stairs to struggle there with the opposing stream that swells upwards from below. But a week later came a second call: “Fellow Tenants! So far no one has reported to me. I was, in so far as the necessity of earning my living allowed, constantly at home, and during the time of my absence, when the door to my room was always left open, a sheet of paper lay on my table on which anyone who so desired could enroll. No one has done so.”

Nowhere is it stated what, if anything, is written on that sheet of paper. That no one has enrolled implies that no names have been added to it. But not a single word here indicates that there is upon the page any writing at all.

To note that omission allows us to place the blank it elides. “In its deepest intention,”

Agamben writes, “philosophy is a firm assertion of potentiality, the construction of an experience of the possible as such. Not thought but the potential to think, not writing but the white sheet is what philosophy refuses at all costs to forget.”

Franz Kafka, quoted in Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Sherry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983), 258. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 249.

Pg. 7: its corollary and completion Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 67-68 (author’s emphasis): “In every representation we make of time and in every discourse by means of which we define and represent time,

another time is implied that is not entirely consumed by representation. It is as though man [*sic* throughout], insofar as he is a thinking and speaking being, produced an additional time with regard to chronological time, a time that prevented him from perfectly coinciding with the time out of which he could make images and representations. This ulterior time, nevertheless, in not another time, it is not a supplementary time added on from outside to chronological time. Rather, it is some-

thing like a time within time—not ulterior but interior—which only measures my disconnection with regard to it, my being out of synch and in non-coincidence with regard to my representation of time, but precisely because of this, allows for the possibility of my achieving and taking hold of it. We may now propose our first definition of messianic time: messianic time is *the time that times takes to come to an end* [...], it is operational time pressing within the chronological time, working and transforming it from within; it is the time we need to make time end: *the time that is left us.*

“Whereas our representation of chronological time, as the time *in which* we are,” Agamben concludes, “separates us from ourselves and transforms us into impotent spectators of ourselves—spectators who look at the time that flies without any time left, continually missing themselves—messianic time, an operational time in which we take hold of and achieve our representations of time, is the time *that* we ourselves are, and for this very reason, is the only real time, the only time we have.”

§II: CONFESSIONS OF A NONPHILOSOPHER

To seek to know before we know is as absurd as the wise resolution of Scholasticus, not to venture into the water until he had learned to swim.

~Hegel

1.

There is a certain plausibility to Nietzsche's observation as to "what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir." If that holds of every great philosophy, does it also hold of all the lesser—that is to say, and in addition, of their authors, 'lesser' philosophers? Those who are no longer read, those who were perhaps never read—is lesser achievement in philosophy, as

in any other endeavor, any less involuntary, any less unconscious? And how could philosophical writing of lesser achievement be read as anything other than memoir? Does Nietzsche's observation, in short, hold any less of lesser philosophers? Or does it not rather hold more?

For fear of having already spoken of myself—if not elsewhere, certainly here—perhaps I can yet provide some clarification, if what I have written turns out to be philosophy.

2.

My work was written under the sign of François Laruelle—without my knowing it—and it is countersigned by Gilles Deleuze.

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari write, “The nonphilosophical is perhaps closer to the heart of philosophy than philosophy itself, and this means that philosophy cannot be content to be understood only philosophically or conceptually, but is addressed essentially to nonphilosophers as well.” That sentence has stayed with me since I first read it, serving subsequently to orient all of my work. The note appended to it refers to Laruelle. At that time, and until very recently, I could not have told you who Laruelle was.

The difference between Laruelle and I is the difference between non-philosophy and, as it were, nonphilosophy. “Laruelle suggests,” as Ray Brassier has glossed it, “that the ‘non’ in the expression ‘non-philosophy’ be understood as akin to the ‘non’ in the expression ‘non-Euclidean’ geometry:

not as a negation or denial of philosophy, but as suspending a specific structure (the philosophical equivalent of Euclid’s fifth axiom concerning parallels) which Laruelle sees as constitutive of the traditional practice of philosophy. New possibilities of thought become available once that structure has been suspended and non-philosophy is an index of those philosophically unenvisageable possibilities.

And I agree, again in Brassier’s words, that “the point, as Laruelle tirelessly repeats, is not to abandon philosophy in favour of a thought of immanence, but to use immanence to think philosophy. It is the consequences of thinking philosophy immanently that are interesting, not thinking immanence philosophically.” And yet that leads us to very different places.

For me, the ‘non’ in ‘nonphilosophical’ makes it an impossible *terminus technicus*: the

‘other’ of philosophy, it approaches a vanishing point with respect to it. And that poses a central problem: Whereas Laruelle doubles down on rigor, I would like to see how far it can be given up.

3.

I only began to write very recently—it was only very recently that I *became able* to write. In college, for example, I found writing increasingly impossible, because whenever I contemplated writing a paper I could never get over the fact that I’d be handing it in to a professor: *What could I possibly have to tell him/her that he/she doesn’t already know?* It was crippling.

In retrospect the difficulty’s clear: I hadn’t yet found those for whom I *could* write.

It was my best friend that saved me. She’s a high school history teacher, and she teaches a philosophy class when enough kids enroll. She—and her students—provided the model: a curious, intelligent general reader. Not a professor, not any kind of specialist—but most importantly, *not a philosopher*. Or not yet.

I should know. I came to philosophy late. And perhaps have not yet arrived.

4.

In a posthumously published fragment, Kafka writes,

I can swim just like the others. Only I have a better memory than the others. I have not forgotten the former inability to swim [literally, 'the former being-able-not-to-swim,' *das einstige Nicht-schwimmen-können*]. But since I have not forgotten it, being able to swim is of no help to me; and so, after all, I cannot swim.

Perhaps all I have done in philosophy is paraphrase Kafka: I can philosophize just like the others, only I have a better memory...

Notes

Pg. 19: To seek to know before we know G.W.F. Hegel, quoted in Lee Braver, *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 61.

Pg. 19: what every great philosophy so far has been Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*,

trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Inc., 1966), 13 (Part One, Sec. 6).

Pg. 19: their authors, ‘lesser’ philosophers
Are ‘lesser’ philosophers, for that reason, less
philosophers?

Pg. 20: countersigned by Gilles Deleuze A
special issue of the journal *Collapse* (Vol. III)
came out not long ago, entitled, “Unknown
Deleuze.” The phrase is apt.

Pg. 20: The nonphilosophical is perhaps closer
Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is
Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and
Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia Uni-
versity Press, 1994), 41.

Pg. 21: Laruelle suggests that the ‘non’ Ray
Brassier, “Axiomatic Heresy: The non-
philosophy of François Laruelle,” *Radical Phi-
losophy* 121 (2003), 25 [24-35].

Pg. 21: the point, as Laruelle tirelessly repeats
Brassier, “Axiomatic Heresy,” 33.

Pg. 21: For me For me, rather classically. See,
inter alia, the very first page of Derrida’s
Margins of Philosophy: “Philosophy has always

insisted upon this: thinking its other. Its other: that which limits it, and from which it derives its essence, its definition, its production.” Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), x.

Pg. 22: how far it can be given up “A simplification is a kind of subtraction or condensation, not to an essence, but to a glimmer of understanding.” John Mullarkey, *Post-Continental Philosophy: An Outline* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 189.

Pg. 22: It was my best friend that saved me
All my work is dedicated to her.

Pg. 23: I can swim just like the others Franz Kafka, quoted in Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 146. Heller-Roazen comments, 146-147: “There is no doubt that achievement, in these terms, grows difficult to measure.”

§III: Immanence (ĩm'ə-nənce) n. 1. A life ...¹

Fichte, to the extent that he overcomes the aporias of subject and object in his later philosophical works, presents the transcendental field^a as a life, which does not depend on a Being and is not subjected to an Act—an absolute immediate consciousness whose very activity does not refer to a being, but is ceaselessly grounded in a life. The transcendental field thus becomes a genuine plane of immanence, reintroducing Spinozism into the most elemental operation of philosophy.²

¹ Gilles Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews, 1975–1995*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina (New York and Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006), 384–389.

² Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 386. Author’s emphasis.

a. “What is a transcendental field?”³ But first, before the first words of the article, and more fundamentally: Why pair “transcendental” with “field”? For Deleuze,⁴ as for Kant,⁵ the transcendental is not the transcendent. The transcendent is, in its Kantian acceptance, and as Werner Pluhar has phrased it, an “overreaching, [B] 671, (i.e.,) going beyond (surpassing) the boundary of (all) (possible) experience, [B] 352-3.”⁶ The transcendental then, by contrast, concerns experience insofar as it is constituted, demarcated, by its boundary: the transcendental informs experience^{aa} as its immanent, constitutive limit. A productive constraint, a placing, the transcendental has the shape of a field.⁷

³ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 384.

⁴ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 385.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), A 296 / B 353.

⁶ See index to Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1013.

⁷ “If what is given with respect to the formation of any field is the strength of the forces involved in its production, then what is given is precisely the *producing* of that field, so that, once again, what is *given* determines the transcendental as the transcendental *of* what is given. What is *given* but never available is, in every case, what cannot be apprehensively reproduced because it exceeds this as its

aa. “It”—the transcendental field—“can be distinguished from experience, to the extent that it does not refer to any object nor belong to any subject (empirical representation). It is thus given as pure a-subjective stream of consciousness, as pre-reflexive impersonal consciousness, or as the qualitative duration of consciousness without a self.”⁸ This is where Deleuze and Kant part ways. If the transcendental field defines the contours of experience and yet does not coincide with experience itself, that’s because the transcendental field does not refer to any object nor belong to any subject, but situates them, as “a milieu.”⁹ A milieu of subjects and objects, and their interactions, the transcendental field is the matrix of experience. And experience, in its incipience, anterior to any subject or object, has the character of an “a-subjective,” “pre-reflexive impersonal consciousness,”^{aaa} “the qualitative

source. In this sense what is *given* is formless production.” Iain Hamilton Grant, “Movements of the World: The Sources of Transcendental Philosophy,” *Analecta Hermeneutica* 3 (2011): 16 [1–17]. All emphasis is the author’s. 17: “The transcendental,” in other words, “*is* the in itself formless form of all forms.”

⁸ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 384.

⁹ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 389.

duration of consciousness without a self.”

aaa. “But the relation of the transcendental field to consciousness is only conceptual.”¹⁰ For “as long as consciousness traverses the transcendental field at an infinite speed everywhere diffused, consciousness can in no way be revealed.”¹¹ Here Deleuze cites Bergson, from the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*: “as though we reflected back the light emanating from surfaces, a light which is self-propagating and does not need to be revealed.”¹² What is the function of “as though,” the beginning of the citation, here? Perhaps the beginning of the citation entertains an intimate relation to its end: the “need not,” of “does not need to be revealed.” As though, hypothetically, a revelation had occurred in this connection. As though there were any question, in this instance. Of its necessity. “In fact, consciousness expresses itself only by being reflected on a subject which refers it to its objects. This is why the transcendental field cannot be defined by the consciousness which is nonetheless coextensive

¹⁰ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 384.

¹¹ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 385.

¹² Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 385. See 399 for the note and quotation.

with it, but which eludes revelation.”¹³, aaaa

aaaa. “Without a consciousness”—without a (any) “revealed” consciousness, consciousness “at an infinite speed”—“the transcendental field could be defined as a pure plane of immanence, because it escapes all transcendence, both of the subject and of the object.”¹⁴ What is to be made of the phrase “plane of immanence,” let alone a “pure” plane? “It is a matter,” as Deleuze writes in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, “of one’s practical conception of the ‘plan.’”¹⁵ *Plan d’immanence*, for Deleuze, and in accordance with two distinct senses of the French *plan*, “is a plan of composition, not a plan of organization or development”¹⁶: “not in the sense of a mental design, a project, a program; it is a plan in the geometric sense: a section, an intersection, a diagram.”¹⁷ Could *plan* not also perhaps—and for that reason—be understood here as a verb? “Plane of immanence” would then be understood accord-

¹³ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 385.

¹⁴ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 385.

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 129.

¹⁶ Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 128.

¹⁷ Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 122.

ing to the objective genitive, as *what remains*. There is perhaps no purer plane.^{aaaaa}

aaaaa. “Absolute immanence is in itself.”¹⁸ Immanence comes from the Latin *immanēre*, to remain in. As for absolute: “The Latin verb *solvo*, from which the adjective ‘absolute’ is derived, can be analyzed as *se-luo* and indicates the work of loosening, freeing (*luo*) that leads (or leads back) something to its own **se*,” where “the reflexive **se* (Greek *he*, Latin *se*, Sanskrit *sva-*) indicates what is proper (cf. the Latin *suus*) and exists autonomously.”¹⁹ To pursue the citation: “Absolute immanence is in itself: it is not in anything, nor can it be attributed *to* something: it does not depend on an object or belong to a subject.”²⁰ And yet, in what sense can immanence be said to be absolute? What’s the status of that affirmation? Immanence is absolute precisely to the extent that immanence, taken absolutely, provides the terms for a clarification of the nature of the transcendental: “Whenever im-

¹⁸ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 385.

¹⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed., trans., Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 116.

²⁰ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 385. Author’s emphasis.

manence is attributed *to* subject and object, which themselves fall outside the plane, the subject being taken as universal, and the object as any object whatsoever, we witness a denaturing of the transcendental.”²¹ However, as transcendental, if immanence is immanent to itself alone, what is the character of that self-relation? In what respect *is* immanence *immanent to itself*? Perhaps, properly, in its very definition. “To *define*, as the term itself yields,” as Kant writes, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*,²² “is in fact intended to mean no more than to exhibit a thing’s comprehensive concept originally within its bounds.” And what might those bounds be, finally, comprehensively? Those of a life... (“ceaselessly grounded in a life.”²³) “The transcendental field is defined by a plane of immanence, and the plane of immanence by a life.”^{24, aaaaaa}

aaaaaa. “We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing more. It is not immanent to life, but the immanence that is in

²¹ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 385. Emphasis author’s.

²² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 727 / B 755.

²³ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 386.

²⁴ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 386.

nothing else is itself a life.”²⁵ *A life*, precisely, is the articulation of immanence to itself. “*A life*,” for Deleuze, “is everywhere, in every moment which a living subject traverses and which is measured by the objects that have been experienced, an immanent life carrying along the events or singularities that are merely actualized in subjects and objects,” for the “singularities or the events which constitute *a life* coexist with the accidents of *the* life that corresponds to it, but they are not arranged and distributed in the same way.”²⁶ A life, in its very articulation, in the arrangement or distribution it effects or is constituted by, does not belong to an individual but to individuation. The latter attains its determination by way of the indefinite: “The indefinite as such is not the mark of an empirical indetermination, but a determination of immanence or a transcendental determinability.^{aaaaaaa} The indefinite article is not the indetermination of the person

without being the determination of the singular. The One (the ‘a,’ the ‘an’) is not the transcendent which can con-

²⁵ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 385–386.

²⁶ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 387. Author’s emphasis.

tain even immanence, but the immanent contained in a transcendental field. ‘A’ or ‘An’ (one) is always the index of a multiplicity: an event, a singularity, a life...²⁷

aaaaaaa. Individuation is the topic of what Deleuze calls, in the article’s opening paragraph, “transcendental empiricism.”²⁸ “To convert Kant from transcendental idealism to transcendental empiricism,” as Steven Shaviro has noted, “and from a juridico-legislative project to a constructivist one, is to move from the possible

to the virtual, and from merely formal conditions of possibility [and of possible experience] to concrete conditions of actualization [that is, to the conditions of real experience]. Deleuze’s transformation of Kant thus leads directly to his famous distinction between the virtual and the possible.²⁹

²⁷ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 388.

²⁸ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 384.

²⁹ Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 34.

“The possible is opposed to the real,” Deleuze writes in *Difference and Repetition*.³⁰ “By contrast, the virtual is not opposed to the real”³¹: “*The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual.*”³² The possible undergoes a process of “realisation,”³³ in other words, whereas the virtual undergoes a process of actualization. But caution is necessary: “It would be wrong to see only a verbal dispute here: it is a question of existence itself.”³⁴ For “the rules of actualization are not those of resemblance and limitation,” as with realization, “but those of difference or divergence and of creation”³⁵: “to the extent that the possible is open to ‘realisation’, it is understood as

an image of the real, while the real is supposed to resemble the possible. That is

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 211.

³¹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 211.

³² Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 208. Author’s emphasis.

³³ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 211.

³⁴ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 211.

³⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 97.

why it is difficult to understand what existence adds to the concept when all it does is double like with like. Such is the defect of the possible: a defect which serves to condemn it as produced after the fact, as retroactively fabricated in the image of what resembles it. The actualisation of the virtual, on the contrary, always takes place by difference, divergence or differentiation. Actualisation breaks with resemblance as a process no less than it does with identity as a principle. Actual terms never resemble the singularities they incarnate. In this sense, actualisation or differentiation is always a genuine creation.³⁶

“Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract,”³⁷ aaaaaaaa the virtual precipitates the unforeseeable. In a word, and by way of its individuation, precisely: *experience*.

aaaaaaaa. The article’s final paragraph begins, indefinitely: “A life contains only virtuals.”³⁸
aaaaaaaa

³⁶ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 212.

³⁷ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 208.

³⁸ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life...,” 388.

aaaaaaaa. A life, yes. But before that, or alongside it, virtually, a text, a doctrine (“transcendental empiricism”), some writing, a few pages, and even—“the qualitative duration of consciousness without a self”—a reading: that is to say, a commentary. Specifically, a philosophical text and a philosophical commentary. Philosophy—*some* philosophy, *a* philosophy—is here an element of articulation, as a life articulates immanence in its immanence to itself. So that when Deleuze writes of “the most elemental operation of philosophy,” perhaps that phrase can be connected, in its virtuality, to what Alberto Toscano calls “the signal task of commentary”³⁹:

to intensify the complexity of the text by selecting and modulating certain moments and perspectives within it, to reorient the reader by inflecting its topology, and, most importantly, to spur the labour of new repetitions, new habita-

³⁹ Alberto Toscano, “The Colored Thickness of a Problem,” preface to Eric Alliez, *The Signature of the World, Or, What is Deleuze and Guattari’s Philosophy?* trans. Eliot Ross Albert and Alberto Toscano (New York and London: Continuum Publishing Group, 2004), xiv [ix–xxv].

tions of the text giving rise to novel connections and redistributions of its singular points.⁴⁰

Philosophy finds its singularity, its “specificity,” according to Toscano, “as a kind of trans-historical machine for counter-actualization”⁴¹: it concerns “not exactly what occurs, but something *in* that which occurs,”⁴² and the conditions of the latter’s extraction. One “delimits the original, disengages from it an abstract line,”⁴³ as one does a quotation. It is along these lines that philosophy finds its definition.⁴⁴ As does *a* life, here. Pursuant to a citation. ...

⁴⁰ Toscano, “The Colored Thickness,” xiv.

⁴¹ Toscano, “The Colored Thickness,” xv.

⁴² Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 149. Author’s emphasis.

⁴³ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 150.

⁴⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 180: “Immanence is the very vertigo of philosophy.” Or perhaps: Philosophy is the very vertigo of immanence.

§IV: ON THE COMMUNISM OF
THOUGHT: A COMMENTARY ON THE
BRIEF, BEAUTIFUL CORRESPOND-
ENCE BETWEEN GILLES DELEUZE AND
DIONYS MASCOLO

Note: The five letters that comprise the correspondence between Gilles Deleuze and Dionys Mascolo were written between 23 April and 6 October 1988, and were first published a decade later, in 1998, a year after Mascolo's death and nearly three years after Deleuze's. They have been republished in Deleuze's Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews, 1975-1995.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Gilles Deleuze, "Correspondence with Dionys Mascolo," *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews, 1975-1995*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina (New York

First letter: Deleuze to Mascolo, 23 April 1988

The occasion of Deleuze's letter, the first letter of what will become the correspondence, is Mascolo's gift to Deleuze of his recently published book, *Autour d'un effort de mémoire*.⁴⁶ Deleuze thanks him for it and mentions that since he read Mascolo's *Le Communisme*—first published 35 years prior, in 1953—he has thought him “one of the authors who has renewed most intensely the relationship between thought and life.”⁴⁷ Mascolo is “able,” according to Deleuze, “to define limit-situations by their internal repercussions.”⁴⁸ As an example Deleuze cites one of Mascolo's sentences, “such an upheaval of general sensibility can only lead to new dispositions of thinking...,” and comments that it “seems to contain a kind of secret in its purity.”⁴⁹ He closes the brief, elegant letter, “Let me express my admiration, and, if you accept it, my friendship.”⁵⁰

and Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006), 327–332. All emphasis is the author's; *sic* throughout.

⁴⁶ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 327.

⁴⁷ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 327.

⁴⁸ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 327.

⁴⁹ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 327.

⁵⁰ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 327.

Second letter: Mascolo to Deleuze, 30 April 1988

A week later Mascolo sends Deleuze a very beautiful response. “Your letter arrived yesterday”—first sentence, first paragraph.⁵¹ The second paragraph begins: “Beyond the praise it contained, of which I cannot believe myself worthy, and not wishing merely to thank you for the generosity you displayed,

I must tell you how much your words touched me. A truly happy moment, as well as a wonderful surprise, to see oneself not only approved, taken at one’s word, but in a way *found out* or, precisely, surprised. This occurred in regards to the sentence you quoted (the one concerning the ‘upheaval of general sensibility’) a sentence that, you say, may hold a secret. This led me (of course!) to ask myself: What could this secret be? And I would like to tell you in a few words the response that came to me.

It seems to me that this apparent secret is none other (but then there is always the risk of wanting to pull it from the shadows) than the secret of

⁵¹ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 328.

thought that is suspicious of thinking. Which is not without its own concerns. A secret—if its concerns do not lead it to seek refuge in shame or affected humor as sometimes happens—that can always be justified in principle. A secret without secrets, or without wanting secrets in any case. And such that if it is recognized (or is found again in another person), it is enough to serve as the basis for any possible friendship. I hope my hypothesis in response to what I sensed was a question is not too reductive.

I send you my regards, in a comradeship of thought, and my thanks.⁵²

“[T]he secret of thought that is suspicious of thinking”: That is the “kind of secret,” “in its purity,” that Mascolo feels Deleuze refers to when quoting his sentence, “such an upheaval of general sensibility can only lead to new dispositions of thinking”⁵³ But how is “thought”—and “thought,” moreover, “that is suspicious of thinking”—to be understood in relation to “general sensibility,” such that “an upheaval” in the latter “can only lead to new

⁵² Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 328.

⁵³ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 327–328.

dispositions of thinking”? And what of its secret?

(Then there’s the status of that secret. Mascolo calls it “apparent,” and notes in parentheses “the risk of wanting to pull it from the shadows.”⁵⁴ What risk is courted here? Can it be known ahead of time, “apparent” though it is? And what’s the risk of upheaval, here, among the shadows?)

In the very next sentence, after Mascolo reveals what he believes the secret to be, “the secret of thought that is suspicious of thinking,” he immediately qualifies it, very movingly: “Which is not without its own concerns.”⁵⁵ What “concerns” are these, and what make them “its”—thought’s—“own,” concerns that may “lead it to seek refuge in shame or affected humor as sometimes happens”?⁵⁶ Are those concerns what guarantee that “a secret”—*that* secret—“can always be justified in principle”?⁵⁷ “A secret without secrets, or without wanting secrets in any case”⁵⁸—what’s the difference between these two phrases? Even if a secret does not want

⁵⁴ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 328.

⁵⁵ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 328.

⁵⁶ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 328.

⁵⁷ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 328.

⁵⁸ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 328.

secrets, is it ever without secrets, secrets of its own concern, in any case, justified or not? How are the concerns of a secret to be squared with its desires? Can *that* be anything other than a secret? And how can it be “recognized,” let alone “found again in another person”?⁵⁹ Even if it’s true that “it”—that recognition—“is enough to serve as the basis of any possible friendship,”⁶⁰ what bearing does friendship have here with respect to upheavals in general sensibility, new dispositions of thinking, thought that’s suspicious of thinking, or its secret?

And all that on account of an offer of friendship? Over a secret, one that concerns a renewal, “intensely,” of “the relationship between thought and life”?

Third letter: Deleuze to Mascolo, 6 August 1988

A little over three months has passed since Mascolo’s letter and Deleuze begins with a recap. “I wrote to you, a few months ago already,

because I admired *Autour d’un effet de mémoire* and because I sensed a ‘secret’

⁵⁹ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 328.

⁶⁰ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 328.

rarely found in a text. Your answer was very kind and thoughtful: if there is a secret, it is the secret of a thought that is suspicious of thinking, thus a ‘concern’ that, if found in another person, is the basis for friendship.⁶¹

“And now I am writing to you again,” Deleuze continues, “not to bother you or ask for another answer, but rather [to continue]⁶² a kind of muted, latent conversation that letters do not interrupt, or even like an interior monologue about a book that continues to haunt me.”⁶³

Then, abruptly (with the very next words—no paragraph break, no warning): “Couldn’t we reverse the order? Friendship

comes first for you. Obviously friendship would not be a more or less favorable external circumstance, but, while remaining the most concrete, it would be an internal condition of thought as such. Not speaking with your friend or remembering him or her, etc., but on

⁶¹ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 329.

⁶² Brackets—and bracketed text—are editor’s or translator’s.

⁶³ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 329.

the contrary going through trials with that person like aphasia or amnesia that are necessary for any thinking. I no longer remember which German poet wrote of the twilight hour when one should be wary ‘*even of a friend.*’ One would go that far, to wariness of a friend, and all of that would, with friendship, put the ‘distress’ in thought in an essential way.⁶⁴

“Couldn’t we reverse the order?”—what’s the sense of that question, its function? “Friendship comes first for you.” On the face of it that assertion seems simply wrong. Were not Mascolo’s very words that “the secret of thought that is suspicious of thinking,” when “recognized,” when “found again in another person,” “is enough to serve as the basis for any possible friendship”?⁶⁵ And what’s more, did not Deleuze himself write as much when recounting Mascolo’s reply? How is one to make sense of that question and its attendant assertion?

The sense of Deleuze’s words begins to become apparent subsequently, with what follows: they seem to take on the character of a

⁶⁴ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 329.

⁶⁵ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 328.

suggestion, a friendly correction. They also seem to clarify a previous remark, one found in Deleuze's first letter: It's not immediately clear what Deleuze means when he states there, in the opening letter of the correspondence, that Mascolo is "able to define limit-situations by their internal repercussions."⁶⁶ He had just written, in the sentence prior, that Mascolo is "one of the authors who has renewed most intensely the relationship between thought and life."⁶⁷ He now writes, as if by way of clarification, of the "internal condition[s] of thought as such,"⁶⁸ and specifically of friendship as one such "internal condition," an "internal repercussion" of "limit-situations" "in the relationship between thought and life"⁶⁹: "I think there are many ways, in the authors I admire, to introduce concrete categories and situations as the condition of pure thought."⁷⁰ Deleuze then lists the fiancée and engagement for Kierkegaard; for Klossowski, "(and maybe Sartre in a different way)," the couple; and for Mascolo and Blanchot, friend-

⁶⁶ Deleuze, "Correspondence," 327.

⁶⁷ Deleuze, "Correspondence," 327.

⁶⁸ Deleuze, "Correspondence," 329.

⁶⁹ Deleuze, "Correspondence," 327 and 329.

⁷⁰ Deleuze, "Correspondence," 329.

ship.⁷¹ “This implies a complete reevaluation of ‘philosophy,’ since you are the only ones

to take the word *philos* literally. Not that you go back to Plato. The Platonic sense of the word is already extremely complex and has never been fully explained. Yet one can easily sense that your meaning is altogether different. *Philos* may have been displaced from Athens to Jerusalem, but it was also enhanced during the Resistance, from the network,⁷² which are affects of thought no less than historical and political situations. There is a sizable history of *Philos* in philosophy of which you

⁷¹ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 329.

⁷² “Marguerite Duras’s apartment”—where Mascolo lived at the time—“became during the Occupation a rendezvous for resisters, Communists and writers like Edgar Morin, Alio Vittorini and his wife Ginetta, Claude Roy, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot and many others. It was typical of their cool-headed humanist conviction that they thought of themselves, not as ‘comrades’ (with all its nationalistic and militaristic connotations) but simply as ‘friends.’” James Kirkup, “Obituary: Dionys Mascolo,” *The Independent*, August 29, 1997: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-dionys-mascolo-1247789.html>.

are already a part or, through all sorts of bifurcations, the modern representative.⁷³

“These are my reasons for returning to your text”—“at the heart of philosophy, in the concrete presupposition (where personal history and singular thinking combine)”⁷⁴—“and to reiterate my admiration.”⁷⁵

Fourth letter: Mascolo to Deleuze, 28 September 1988

Almost two months later Mascolo replies. “I found your letter and your book,” the first words read, “when I returned. Thank you.”⁷⁶ A new paragraph begins: “I am deeply touched

by your consideration. Despite the confidence I have in your judgment, it has left me, to be frank, somewhat embarrassed,

⁷³ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 329–330.

⁷⁴ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 330. This phrase appears in the sentence immediately preceding the one in which it is here interpolated. The context makes the reference clear.

⁷⁵ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 330.

⁷⁶ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 330.

I admit. My perhaps misguided shame would have prevented me from responding if you had not already given me a certain freedom in speaking of a *monologue*.

What I was trying to say, in response to your first letter (your remarks led to this situation), was that if there were any wariness in a thought toward thinking itself, an emergence of confidence (which is too much, but at least the temptation to lower one's guard) can only come with the *sharing of thought*. This sharing of thought must also take place on the basis of the same distrust or a similar 'distress' to form a friendship. [...]

You suggest a reversal of the proposition, making friendship come first. Friendship would then put the 'distress' in thought. Once again due to distrust, but this time distrust of friends. But then where would this friendship come from? That is the mystery for me. And I cannot imagine what *distrust* (an occasional disagreement, of course, on the contrary—and in an entirely different sense that excludes *malevolence*) is possible of a friend once he

or she has been accepted in friendship.⁷⁷

What Mascolo writes here seems clear. What he writes here is largely what he wrote before: friendship is consequent to an experience of the “distress” at issue.⁷⁸ If there were any “wariness”⁷⁹ or “suspicion”⁸⁰ of thought with respect to thinking, when it is “recognized,” when “it is found again in another person,” it can serve as an occasion for friendship—“it is enough,” even, “to serve as the basis for any possible friendship.”⁸¹

So Mascolo resists the “reversal”⁸² Deleuze proposes: friendship, emphatically, does not come first for Mascolo. “You suggest a reversal of the proposition, making friendship come first. Friendship would then put the ‘distress’ in thought. Once again due to distrust”—not thought’s distrust of thinking, as before—“but this time distrust of friends. But then where would this friendship come from? That is the

⁷⁷ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 330–331.

⁷⁸ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 329.

⁷⁹ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 329, 330.

⁸⁰ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 328, 330.

⁸¹ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 328.

⁸² Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 329.

mystery for me.”⁸³

And that’s also the crux of it: Mascolo writes from the standpoint of friendship, Deleuze, from the standpoint of philosophy: Mascolo stresses the consequences of thought’s “distress” for life, while Deleuze stresses its consequences for thought. Deleuze first wrote to Mascolo as to “one of the authors who has renewed most intensely the relationship between thought and life.”⁸⁴ Each writes from within that relationship, but each writes from the opposite vantage: Mascolo emphasizes the genesis of friendship and what the “distress” that forms its basis means for life, “an emergence of confidence”⁸⁵ (even if that’s “too much,” and rather “at least the temptation to lower one’s guard”),⁸⁶ while Deleuze insists on the necessity of trials, “trials with that person,” the friend, trials “like aphasia or amnesia,” ones “that are necessary for any thinking” as “internal condition[s] of thought as such.”⁸⁷ The emphases may differ but the “concerns” do not. And that’s the secret, the renewal effect-

⁸³ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 331.

⁸⁴ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 327.

⁸⁵ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 331.

⁸⁶ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 331. Mascolo placed this qualification in parentheses.

⁸⁷ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 329.

ed here: the correspondence between Mascolo and Deleuze shows “the *sharing of thought*”⁸⁸ as it is shared out between friends. Mascolo writes, “I have called this *communism of thought* in the past. And I placed it

under the auspices of Hölderlin, who may have only fled thought because he was unable to live it: ‘The life of the spirit between friends, the thoughts that form in the exchange of words, by writing or in person, are necessary to those who seek. Without that, we are by our own hands outside thought.’⁸⁹

“To you,” Mascolo closes, “with complete and grateful friendship. Forgive the elementary aspects of this response.”⁹⁰

Then, daringly, in a kind of reversal or upheaval, Mascolo adds a postscript: “In the end, I should have limited myself to saying:

but what if friendship was precisely the possibility of sharing thought, from and in a common distrust with regards to thought? And what if thought that

⁸⁸ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 331.

⁸⁹ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 331.

⁹⁰ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 331.

distrusted itself was the search for this sharing between friends? Something that is already happy no doubt seeks something else that can scarcely be named. Daring to say it would be an obscure will, the need to approach an innocence of thought.⁹¹

“Of course I say this with a little laugh,” he concludes. “Your questions have pushed me to avow some half-thoughts—like when you come to take the acts accomplished in a dream as your own. Forgive me.”⁹²

Fifth letter: Deleuze to Mascolo, 6 October 1988

“Dear Dionys Mascolo,⁹³

Thank you for your very rich letter. My question was: How can a friend, without losing his or her singularity, be inscribed as a condition of thought? Your response is very lovely. And it is a question of what we call and experience as *philosophy*. Asking more ques-

⁹¹ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 332.

⁹² Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 332.

⁹³ Deleuze, “Correspondence,” 332.

tions would only hold you back, and
you have already given me so much.

With my respect and friendship.

Gilles Deleuze

§V: THE MORE BEAUTIFUL QUESTION⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Steven Shaviro, “Preface: A Philosophical Fantasy,” *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), ix [ix–xvi]: “This book originated out of a philosophical fantasy. I imagine a world in which

Whitehead takes the place of Heidegger. Think of how important Heidegger has been for thinking and critical reflection over the past sixty years. What if Whitehead, instead of Heidegger, had set the agenda for postmodern thought? What would philosophy be like today? What different questions might we be asking? What different perspectives might we be viewing the world from?

The parallels between Heidegger and Whitehead are striking. *Being and Time* was published in 1927, *Process and Reality* in 1929. Two enormous philosophy books, almost exact contemporaries. Both books respond magisterially to the situation (I’d rather not say the crisis) of

modernity, the immensity of scientific and technological change, the dissolution of old certainties, the increasingly fast pace of life, the massive reorganizations that followed the horrors of World War I. Both books take for granted the inexistence of foundations, not even fixating on them as missing, but simply going on without concern over their absence. Both books are antiessentialist and antipositivist, both of them are actively engaged in working out new ways to think, new ways to do philosophy, new ways to exercise the faculty of wonder.

And yet how different these two books are: in concepts, in method, in affect, and in spirit. I'd like to go through a series of philosophical questions and make a series of (admittedly tendentious) comparisons, in order to spell out these differences as clearly as possible.

Shaviro goes on to compare Whitehead and Heidegger on eight points, eight "questions": the question of beginnings, that of the history of philosophy, of metaphysics, of language, of style, technology, representation, and subjectivity. And yet there's no question of the question *itself*—not as it's at work in Heidegger and Whitehead. It's admittedly a very minor point, if not tendentious as well. So much so, in fact, this is offered in jest. Itself something of a fantasy. And one, it's hoped, no less philosophical.

You are so young, so much before all beginning, and I would like to beg you, dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.

~Rilke

*Always the beautiful answer who asks a
more beautiful question*

~E.E. Cummings

1.

What is a question? A question, it will quickly be surmised, that already precipitates so many others—perhaps principally: What is its nature, its status? What's posed in a question, or by it?

2.

Early in the “Introduction” to *Being and Time*, “The Exposition of the Question of the Meaning of Being,” in the second section of its first half, more specifically, Heidegger “briefly” discusses “what belongs to a question in general.” In general, and immediately, it’s evident that what belongs to a question, for Heidegger, is a kind of activity: questioning.

“Every questioning,” Heidegger begins his exposition, “is a seeking. Every seeking takes its direction beforehand from what is sought. Questioning,” in that sense, “is a knowing search,” and a “knowing search can become an ‘investigation,’

as the revealing determination of what the question aims at. As questioning about . . . questioning has *what it asks about*. All asking about . . . is in some way an inquiring of . . . Besides what is asked, what is *interrogated* also belongs to questioning. What is questioned is to be defined and conceptualized in the investigating, that is, the specifically theoretical, question. As what is really intended, what is to be *ascertained* lies in what is questioned; here questioning arrives at its goal.

Questioning arrives at its goal at the same time that the exposition arrives at a critical juncture: The next sentence reads, “As an attitude adopted by a being, the questioner, questioning has its own character of being.” A question, on Heidegger’s account, depends for “its own character of being” on the activity of questioning, and questioning, as an activity, relies in turn on the questioner who performs it: in other words, according to Heidegger, what a question is—its “being”—depends on another being, the questioner, where it attains its determination, moreover, as a consequence of an “attitude” “adopted” by the latter.

On that basis, and on the basis of the everyday understanding of being everywhere in evidence, Heidegger will claim a preeminence, a precedence, of the question of the meaning of being over all other questions, and, indeed, subordinates all other questions—all questioning—to it. But what of the question itself, as question? What about the “being” of the question before or beyond being, any question of being, or its meaning?

3.

What’s left of the question then, the question of the question? What does that question ar-

ticulate, if anything, in that question alone?

That is perhaps, following Cummings, the “more beautiful” question (more beautiful than the question of (the meaning of) being). But what is the value of beauty here, and from whence does it come? More crucially—and in partial answer—how is Cummings’ phrase to be read? Is “answer” a noun (where “beautiful” is an adjective)? Or is the subject of the (incomplete) phrase (there’s no period) “the beautiful” (where “answer” is a verb)? What is “the beautiful answer,” then? What makes an answer beautiful? What makes the beautiful answer, always? (“Always the beautiful answer...”) And in what sense is there asked, in all of this, “a more beautiful question”?

4.

*—the beauty we understand precisely
because we do not yet understand it—
~Adorno*

But first, and more fundamentally: What is beauty? Beauty is an event, as Whitehead says, and, as per Kant, it occurs between a subject and an object, a disinterested subject and an indifferent object: What’s beautiful is the disappearance of the two by way of the

coincidence they stage: The event of beauty is the formation of the perspective within which meet the indifference of the object to the subject and the disinterestedness of the subject with respect to it as a vanishing point.

5.

There are, then, successful ways of not knowing oneself, and beauty is one of them.

~Agamben

“The ways in which we do not know things are just as important (and perhaps even more important) as the ways in which we know them.” “It is possible, in fact,” Giorgio Agamben continues, “that the way in which we are able to be ignorant is precisely what defines the rank of what we are able to know and that the articulation of a zone of nonknowledge is the condition—and at the same time the touchstone—of all our knowledge.” “The articulation of a zone of nonknowledge”—how’s that formula to be understood? How’s the task it proposes to be accomplished?

Earlier, some twenty-five years before, Agamben ended one of his books with a fable, as if (already) by way of explanation. “The most diverse legends circulate about the inexplicable. The most ingenious—which was

found by the present guardians of the Temple while rifling through the ancient traditions—claims that, being inexplicable, it remains so in all the explanations which have been given and that will continue to be given through the centuries. Indeed, precisely these explanations constitute the best guarantee of its inexplicability”: “Our illustrious fathers—the patriarchs—finding nothing to explain, searched their hearts

for a way to express this mystery; but for the inexplicable, they found no more fitting expression than explanation itself. The only way—they argued—to explain that there is nothing to explain is to give explanations. Any other stance, including silence, seizes on the inexplicable too clumsily: explanations alone leave it intact.

“Explanations are, in fact,” so the fable concludes, “only a moment in the tradition of the inexplicable: they are the moment, to be more precise,

which keeps watch over it by leaving it unexplained. Emptied of their content, explanations thus fulfill their task. But at the point where explanations, by

showing their emptiness, leave it be, the inexplicable itself is in jeopardy. Only the explanations were, in truth, inexplicable, and the legend was invented to explain them. What was not to be explained is perfectly contained in what no longer explains anything.

“What was not to be explained is perfectly contained in what no longer explains anything”: It’s here, between explanation and the inexplicable—inexplicably, and yet without need of another word—that a zone of non-knowledge is articulated: “Perhaps a zone of nonknowledge does not exist at all; perhaps”—beautifully, vanishingly—“only its gestures exist.”

Notes

Pg. 58: live your way into the answer Rainier Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 34-5. Emphasis author’s.

Pg. 58: Always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question E. E. Cummings, “Introduction,” *New Poems*, in *Complete Poems: 1904-1962*, ed. George J. Firmage (New

York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1994), 462 [461–462].

Pg. 59: what belongs to a question in general Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 3. “Like Hegel’s Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit,” David Farrell Krell observes, “which came to serve as an introduction to Hegel’s entire philosophy, Heidegger’s Introduction opens a path to all the later work.” Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 38.

Pg. 59: here questioning arrives at its goal Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 3–4. Author’s emphasis.

Pg. 60: indeed, subordinates all other questions—all questioning—to it Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 4–17.

Pg. 60: But what of the question itself, as question? Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 17–18 (author’s emphasis): “We were speaking a moment ago of the question. Now precisely

this entity which we are, this ‘we’ which, at the beginning of the existential analytic, must have no name other than *Da-sein*, is chosen for the position of exemplary entity

only from *the experience of the question*, the possibility of the *Fragen*, as it is inscribed in the network of the *Gefragte* (Being), the *Erfragte* (the meaning of Being), of the *Befragte der Seinsfrage*, that is the entity which we are and which thus becomes the exemplary or privileged entity for a *reading*—Heidegger’s word—of the meaning of Being. The point of departure in the existential analytic is legitimated first of all and only from the possibility, experience, structure, and regulated modifications of the *Fragen*. [...] How, without confirming it a priori and circularly, can we *question* this inscription in the structure of the *Fragen* from which *Dasein* will have received, along with its privilege (*Vorrang*), its first, minimal, and most secure determination? Even supposing that this structure is described properly by Heidegger (which is not certain, but I leave that to one side for the moment), any worry as to the legitimacy or axiomatic necessity of such a

point of departure in a reflection on the being-able-to-question would leave intact neither the principle, nor the order, nor finally the interest of the existential analytic: in three words, of *Sein und Zeit*.

Pg. 61: What does that question articulate, if anything, in that question alone? Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 384. 440: “A successful question, here as elsewhere, is the one that finds its respondent, that learns to discern what matters to what is interrogated.” “If I ask you a question at the right moment,

in the right terms, with the right intonation, so that you suddenly see a way out where the situation was blocked, my question will have proved its relevance by its effects, by the way that your experience is transformed. In other words, your transformation is an answer, but it is by no means an answer ‘to my question’: it answers for the relevance of the question as a lure that has initiated the process of which your experience is the truth.

Pg. 61: —the beauty we understand precisely because we do not yet understand it— Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature: Volume One*, trans. Shierry Weber Nichol森 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 57. See Alexander Nehamas, “An Essay on Beauty and Judgment,” *The Threepenny Review* 80 (2000): 4–7.

Pg. 61: as Whitehead says Alfred North Whitehead, “Beauty,” in *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 252–265. Shaviro, *Without Criteria*, 4 (author’s emphasis): “Beauty is therefore an *event*, a process, rather than a condition or a state.”

Pg. 61: a disinterested subject and an indifferent object Immanuel Kant, “Analytic of the Beautiful,” *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 43–97. Shaviro, *Without Criteria*, 5 (author’s emphasis): “A subject does not cognize the beauty of an object. Rather, the object *lures* the subject while remaining indifferent to it; and the subject *feels* the object, without knowing it or possessing it.”

Pg. 62: and beauty is one of them Giorgio Agamben, “The Last Chapter in the History

of the World,” in *Nudities*, trans. David Kisshik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 113 [113–114].

Pg. 62: the ways in which we know them Agamben, “The Last Chapter,” 113.

Pg. 62: the touchstone—of all our knowledge Agamben, “The Last Chapter,” 113.

Pg. 62: (already) by way of explanation Giorgio Agamben, “Kafka Defended Against His Interpreters,” in *Idea of Prose*, trans. Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 137 [137–138]. *Idea Della Prosa* was first published in 1985.

Pg. 63: the best guarantee of its inexplicability Agamben, “Kafka Defended,” 137.

Pg. 63: explanations alone leave it intact Agamben, “Kafka Defended,” 137.

Pg. 64: what no longer explains anything Agamben, “Kafka Defended,” 138.

Pg. 64: perhaps only its gestures exist Agamben, “The Last Chapter,” 114. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans.

Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 91–92: “The zone of non-knowledge—or of a-knowledge [*ignoscenza*—that is at issue here is beyond both knowing and not knowing, beyond both dis-concealing and concealing, beyond both being and the nothing. But what is thus left to be outside of being is not thereby negated or taken away; it is not, for this reason, nonexistent. It is an existing, real thing that has gone beyond the difference between being and beings.”

Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 92: “We have to search whether nature does not in its very being show itself as self-explanatory.”

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W. dreams, like Phaedrus, of an army of thinker-friends, thinker-lovers. He dreams of a thought-army, a thought-pack, which would storm the philosophical Houses of Parliament. He dreams of Tartars from the philosophical steppes, of thought-barbarians, thought-outsiders. What distance would shine in their eyes!

~Lars Iyer

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I MUST TELL YOU

HOW MUCH . . .

Epistolary Philosophy

The Communism of Thought

Michael Munro

If you don't admire something, if you don't love it, you have no reason to write a word about it. (Gilles Deleuze)

The Communism of Thought takes as its point of departure a passage in a letter from Dionys Mascolo to Gilles Deleuze: "I have called this communism of thought in the past. And I placed it under the auspices of Hölderlin, who may have only fled thought because he was unable to live it: 'The life of the spirit between friends, the thoughts that form in the exchange of words, by writing or in person, are necessary to those who seek. Without that, we are by our own hands outside thought.'" What, in light of that imperative, is a correspondence? What is given to be understood by the word, let alone the phenomenon? What constitutes a correspondence? What occasions it? On what terms and according to what conditions may one enter into that exchange "necessary," in Hölderlin's words, "to those who seek"? Pursuant to what vicissitudes may it be conducted? And what end(s) might a correspondence come to have beyond the ostensible end that, to all appearances, it (inevitably) will be said to have had? And what is the proximity, here, between correspondence and commentary? To what extent might commentary approximate a kind of correspondence? (And with whom? The author of the source text? The source text itself? A future reader of that text? Or then again a third, or fourth, or nth party? And by way of what channels?)

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dead letter office





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