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PhD Examination

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Word count: 81,516

The Ethics of Thinking in
Heidegger, Bruno & Spinoza

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present work is to face Heidegger's claim that philosophy has ended. Facing this claim for us has not taken the form of creating a new method or posing a new question but that of a search for anomalies in what Heidegger decrees as finished, which is philosophy as metaphysics. In his historical confrontation with the history of thought Heidegger seems to have left out, dismissed or forgotten those authors who do not fit into his definition of metaphysics. We have chosen Giordano Bruno and Baruch Spinoza, metaphysical thinkers who have undertaken a philosophical practice that does not intend to demolish *subjectivity* but actually begins without any need for it. The birth of the *subject* as grounding reality finds its affirmation with Descartes and inaugurates modernity that, according to Heidegger, exhausts philosophy and leads it into the arms of modern science and technology. Bruno and Spinoza respectively precede and follow the birth of modernity and of modern science, which they look at with an eye that is not that of the modern *subject*. Following their different approaches to philosophy, we shall also explore their relation to Renaissance Humanism, dismissed by Heidegger as a historical reiteration of the Roman world, perceived as a perversion of the Greek origin of thought. We shall show how hasty such a dismissal is. Our goal is to show not merely that Heidegger is wrong but that if Western thinking contains the seeds of its own end, it also contains the ones of a different understanding of the Western world and its achievements. The three authors will engage on the grounds of ontology, gnosiology and ethics and yet we have defined the whole enterprise of this work as an *ethics* overall. An *ethics of thinking* is a practice of thought that wishes to envisage the possibility for Western man of inhabiting his own world by understanding himself not as an isolated *subject* and master of nature but as the place where the unity and multiplicity of nature come to be thought at the same time.

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Introduction

Section 1 - The view from the Moon

*Ahi ahi, ma conosciuto il mondo
non cresce, anzi si scema, e assai più vasto
l'etra sonante e l'alma terra e il mare
al fanciullin, che non al saggio, appare.*

[...]

*Ecco svanire a un punto,
e figurato è il mondo in breve carta;
ecco tutto è simile, e discoprendo,
solo il nulla s'accresce.*

(Giacomo Leopardi, *Ad Angelo Mai*)¹

On the 25th of August 2012 Neil Armstrong, the first man to have stepped on the Moon, passed away. During the Summer of 1969 the world was watching with excitement an event that had, allegedly, changed the history of humanity. «That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind», were his first words as he stepped lunar soil, on the 20th of July. An Italian commentator and writer, Massimo Fini, in an article entitled *The last man on the Earth*², observes how appalling it was to hear such a trivial sentence from a man who must have been in an emotionally unique state of mind, for he was seeing the Earth as no one else had ever seen it, that is, from the Moon. It was later revealed that the NASA Press Office had instructed him to say the famous sentence. As with Armstrong's declaration, so too every detail of his actions

¹ “Ouch, ouch, but once the world is known it does not grow, it is lessened, and the ringing sky, the world soul and the sea, appear way larger to the young boy than to the wise. [...] There, they [our dreams: *ed*] disappeared at some point and the world is depicted as a small chart; there, everything's the same and, through discovering, nothingness grows”. My translation in prose from Italian. From G. Leopardi, “Ad Angelo Mai”, in G. Leopardi, *Canti*, introduction by F. Gavazzeni, notes by F. Gavazzeni and M. M. Lombardi, BUR, Milano 2011, pp. 137-139.

² See M. Fini, “L'ultimo uomo sulla Terra”, in *Il Fatto Quotidiano* [28/08/2012], Rome 2012, p. 22.

and the Apollo 11 mission in general was meticulously planned, calculated and controlled by the NASA technicians; it could not have been otherwise. That is what technology is about. From this Fini moves on to noticing how that event stood for something different from what is generally believed to have been a giant leap for mankind and that was the end of the human individual, who was now as replaceable as a robot: Armstrong, in this sense, had nothing in common with Galileo or Columbus, individuals fighting against common sense. This is a fair journalistic point, as it raises an interesting issue for the general public. Philosophically, nevertheless, we are drawn to read this episode in a completely different manner and at a first reading, we could attempt the following interpretation: on July 20th, 1969, nothing new really happened. The Apollo 11 mission was a perfectly coherent application of Galileo's mathematical reading of the universe. Columbus was also being scientific, basing his voyage on mathematical calculations, however inexact and primitive. Due to political or religious isolation, it could be affirmed that Galileo and Columbus were, indeed, individuals who stood out as such because of their courage and intelligence, but they were also bearers of a thinking that would have led straight to Armstrong's moon-landing. That same thinking would have produced, indeed, the "individual", the "replaceable", of which Armstrong's mission did not decree the end but provided the utmost historical confirmation. These are all strong claims that cannot be justified on the spot because, more than being argued, they are in need of being practiced: the philosopher's point of view is neither assumed nor demonstrated, it is exercised. Sometimes a philosopher does not need to go all the way to the Moon to know what it feels like to be in Armstrong's shoes. In 1584 Giordano Bruno, an Italian philosopher born in Nola, in the Kingdom of Naples, published *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, the first of a series of books written in Italian during his sojourn in England. This work was mainly devoted to a philosophical exploration of the new Copernican theories, by which Bruno was largely inspired. Copernicus allowed Bruno to develop a perspective that was not only too advanced for Copernicus himself but that would have sounded much truer, although maybe

disappointing for some, had it come out of Armstrong's lips: «the moon is no more heaven for us than we are for the moon»³. This is the perspective of the *infinite*, where everything is at once centre and periphery and *man* is automatically expelled from the centre of the universe. Could that be a more appropriate intuition for someone who has just stepped on the Moon and is looking at the Earth, which is now his sky? The NASA Press Office, speaking through Armstrong's lips, on the other hand, was re-affirming anthropocentrism. A task is emerging, that of taking man off the stage and letting the show of nature begin.

For Martin Heidegger, science and technology were a thought-provoking issue, for he saw them as the outcome of the whole Western metaphysical tradition. He took upon himself the heavy burden of facing the whole Western tradition to explore what lies at the origin of Western thinking. In 1964 he delivered an important lecture entitled *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, where he decreed the end of philosophy as metaphysics, which had reached its completion in modern science. Heidegger did not undertake an enterprise of philosophical archaeology, for we find that neither the origin nor the end of philosophy is expressed in terms of duration in his thought. Nor is the *origin* a historical fact such as the beginning and the end of World War II or sinking the flagpole into the ground of the Moon. Duration and extension, which characterize historical facts, are not applicable to the notion of the origin and the end of philosophy: the *origin* is present in each movement of thinking and instructs it; similarly the *end* does not denote the conclusion of a civilization but it underlies it in its entirety. As Heidegger put it: «We forget that already in the age of Greek philosophy a decisive characteristic of philosophy appears: the development of the sciences within the field that philosophy opened up. The development of the sciences is at the same time their separation from philosophy and the establishment of

³ G. Bruno, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, edited and translated by E. A. Gosselin and L. S. Lerner, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2008, p. 91. For the original version see G. Bruno, "La Cena de le Ceneri", in G. Bruno, *Opere Italiane vol. I*, critical edition by G. Aquilecchia, general coordination by N. Ordine, UTET, Turin 2007, p. 456: «[...] non più la luna è cielo a noi che noi alla luna».

their independence. This process belongs to the completion of philosophy»⁴. Is *man* a protagonist or a puppet in this representation? In Armstrong's case, we saw that *man* was instructed by NASA and the Press Office in each of his actions but NASA themselves were only affirming what was already the case on planet Earth and that is a further extension of *man* understanding himself as the master of *nature*. This only works as long as *man* places himself outside of *nature* and becomes its very *substratum*, its grounding, the finest realization of which was conceived by Descartes in the *cogito ergo sum*. From Descartes onwards, the standard for being human becomes the rational *subject*, the so-called *thinking thing* [*res cogitans*]. *Nature*, as an extended thing [*res extensa*], becomes an *object* of measurement and calculation. In this lies, allegedly, the greatest affirmation of Western *man*, which we call *modernity* in its historical manifestation.

André Glucksmann, rather theatrically, tells of a conference which was to take place in Paris and which is depicted by him more as a match than as an academic gathering: French thinkers *versus* German thinkers, the former representing the eradication of man from nature and the latter representing a newly found proximity to it: «In 1937, Paris summons a conference on Descartes and counts on celebrating with great pomp the three-hundredth anniversary of the *Discourse on Method* (1637); the intellectual eminences are invited to celebrate the great *oeuvre* under the banner of Humanism. Enlightenment against Barbarity! Heidegger proposes himself as the leader of the counter-offensive of the Reich by heading the German delegation. [...] Drum rolls and Wagnerian foghorns! On one side, the mathematisation of nature, which has become an object (*res extensa*) of domination by a subject (*res cogitans*), “master and owner”. Drum! On the other side, “for the first time in the history of the West, thanks to the writers and thinkers of the German idealism, a metaphysical wisdom of the essence of history has been inaugurated”. To the French the wild and devastating exploitation of Nature. To the Germans the rapt and loving meditation

⁴ M. Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”, in M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, edited by D. Farrel Krell, Routledge, Oxon 1993, p. 433.

that reinvests man in his own history. [...] France had played the wrong card. Understood in a Heideggerian fashion, Descartes is the henchman of planetary uprooting»⁵. This ironic, provoking and enjoyable representation of the preparation for an event that never took place – due to Nazi diplomatic resistance – contains several points that need to be addressed. The representation of Humanism as assimilated to the Cartesian philosophy of the *subject* and to the Enlightenment is a twist of Humanism itself and so is the antithesis between French Enlightenment and German Idealism. In Heidegger’s opinion the latter is the actual achievement of absolute subjectivity, which extends all the way to phenomenology: «From the perspective of Hegel and Husserl – and not only from their perspective – the matter of philosophy is subjectivity»⁶. Nevertheless, we are witnessing a conceptual short circuit here, for in Heidegger’s opinion Humanism is assimilated to the history of the *subject*: «Humanism is opposed because it does not set the *humanitas* of the human being high enough. Of course the essential worth of the human being does not consist in his being the substance of beings, as the “Subject” among them, so that the tyrant of being he may deign to release the beingness of beings into an all too loudly glorified “objectivity”»⁷. We are sympathetic to Heidegger’s project of *thinking* man in his essence, free from the constraints of the *subject/object* dichotomy. Nevertheless, Heidegger is fighting against the wrong enemy. Humanism and

⁵ A. Glucksmann, *Les deux chemins de la philosophie*, Plon, Paris 2009, pp. 187-188. My translation from French: «En 1937, Paris convoque un congrès Descartes et compte célébrer en grande pompe le tricentenaire du *Discours de la méthode* (1637); les éminences intellectuelles sont invitées à fêter le grand œuvre sous la bannière de l’Humanisme. Lumières contre Barbarie ! Heidegger propose de diriger la contre-offensive du Reich à la tête de la délégation allemande. [...] Roulements de tambour et cornes de brume wagnériennes! D’un côté , la mathématisation de la Nature qui livre la matière devenue objet (*res extensa*) à la domination d’un sujet (*res cogitans*), ‘maître et possesseur’. Tambour! De l’autre, ‘pour la première fois dans l’histoire de l’Occident, grâce aux écrivains et aux penseurs de l’idéalisme allemand, un savoir métaphysique de l’essence de l’histoire a été inauguré’. Aux Français l’exploitation effrénée et dévastatrice de la Nature. Aux Allemands la méditation recueillie et amoureuse qui réinvestit l’homme dans son histoire. [...] la France avait tiré la mauvaise carte. Descartes, heideggeriennement compris, est le suppôt du déracinement planétaire».

⁶ M. Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”, in M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p. 440.

⁷ M. Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”, in M. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, edited by W. McNeill, Cambridge University Press, New York 1998, pp. 251-252.

Renaissance culture⁸ – dismissed by Heidegger as a mere *renascentia romanitatis* – does not need or conceive of a *subject*; on the other hand, it promotes *man*'s nearness to *nature* as opposed to its mastery. Humanism rejects medieval language and the sterile logic of academic disputes, hence man's stereotype as *animal rationale*, which is hardly a prelude to his identification with the *res cogitans*. Finally, Humanism and the Renaissance find one of their most powerful expressions in the works of Giordano Bruno, the man whose *thinking* stepped on lunar ground much earlier than Armstrong's feet and with a much clearer gaze. That gaze intended to overthrow *man* from his central position as master of nature and opened up the gates of *infinity*.

Giordano Bruno from Nola was burnt alive at the stake in Rome on the 17th of February 1600 by the secular arm of the Roman Inquisition after an imprisonment and a trial that lasted roughly eight years. His death occurred unusually early in the morning for an exemplary and public execution of a heretic, almost suggesting how hesitant his executioners were. Ingrid D. Rowland, in her intellectual biography of the Nolan, reports a dispatch from Rome of February 19th of the same year: «Thursday morning in Campo de' Fiori that wicked Dominican friar from Nola was burned alive, the one mentioned before: the most obstinate of heretics, and because in his imagination he had formed certain beliefs contrary to our faith, and in particular about the Holy Virgin and the Saints, the wicked man wanted to die obstinate in those beliefs. And he said that he died a martyr, and willingly, and that his soul would ascend with the smoke into paradise. Well, now he will see whether he spoke the

⁸ Although Humanism and the Renaissance seem so closely, even causally, related, the complexity of their relationship is often underestimated and is surely not acknowledged by Heidegger, who seems to easily assimilate them. Nevertheless, as Nauert notes more recently: «Alongside the cultural mastery achieved by fifteenth-century Italian humanism stand the extraordinary artistic achievements of the age. The relationship of Renaissance art to humanism seems at first glance to be simple and direct, but in reality it is not. Italians of the late Renaissance regarded the flowering of humanistic studies and the flowering of art as merely two parallel examples of a comprehensive cultural renewal, a rebirth of true civilization». From C. G. Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe* [second edition], New Approaches to European History, Cambridge University Press, New York 2006, p. 80.

truth»⁹. Bruno had no vocation for martyrdom; his interminable trial was a meticulously defensive attempt to sever his philosophy from theology by dissimulating the devastating impact of his thinking on religion. He surely was a heretic and looked at religion with no favour, a religion that was seen as responsible for the bloodshed raging throughout Europe at the time, a time of crisis that was also intellectual. Persecuted by Catholics, excommunicated by Calvinists, scorned by Anglicans and hardly tolerated by Lutherans, he toured the whole of Europe from Italy to Switzerland, then to France and England, finally from Bohemia to Germany and back to Italy. As Michele Ciliberto points out, nevertheless, it would be wrong to enclose Bruno's thinking within a purely Christian horizon and reduce his character to that of a mere heretic. As a matter of fact, the length of the trial was in great part due to a number of novelties that permeated Bruno's philosophy, which made it hard for the Inquisition itself to grasp the meaning and significance of his work. Says Ciliberto: «But with his existential and philosophical experience, Bruno walked, with great awareness, along a path that was located beyond Christianity, in a post-Christian perspective. It is peculiar – even paradoxical – that he enacted this project looking “back” and not “ahead”, embracing the “myth” of ancient wisdom, of the *prisca theologia* spread by the Florentine circle of Marsilio Ficino and contributing enthusiastically to the dissemination of the fantastic image of Egypt as a place of wisdom and home to the gods»¹⁰. We are facing a rather eclectic Dominican friar who, during his youth at the Neapolitan convent, eagerly consumed the texts of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, only to become later a fierce critic of Aristotle. The encounter with the Neoplatonists was crucial only for Bruno to twist and empty the

⁹ I. D. Rowland, *Giordano Bruno. Philosopher/Heretic* [2008], Chicago University Press, Chicago 2009, p. 278.

¹⁰ M. Ciliberto, *Giordano Bruno. Il teatro e la vita*, Mondadori, Milano 2007, p. 50. My translation from the Italian: «Ma con la sua esperienza esistenziale e filosofica Bruno intese muoversi, con grande consapevolezza, lungo un orizzonte che si situava dopo il cristianesimo, in una prospettiva post-cristiana. È singolare – e perfino paradossale – che egli abbia attuato questo progetto procedendo ‘all’indietro’, invece di andare ‘avanti’, facendo suo il ‘mito’ dell’antica sapienza, della *prisca theologia* diffuso dal circolo fiorentino di Marsilio Ficino e contribuendo a divulgare, con entusiasmo, l’immagine favolosa dell’Egitto come sede della sapienza e degli dèi».

very Neoplatonic notions that he adopted. Although well read in most of the philosophy of his time, he looked back to the Hermetic tradition and to the Egyptians as the *origin* of wisdom as proximity to *nature*.

Heidegger, a philosopher of the *origin*, is moved by a similar drive: by rediscovering *things* as opposed to *objects*, he wishes to reactivate the fourfold of mortals, sky, earth and gods, which has been lost and covered up by metaphysics and modern science. There is a crucial difference, though, an element that makes Bruno extraordinary: Bruno is an enthusiastic supporter of the new science emerging at his time and not only the first philosopher to endorse the Copernican Revolution fully but to take it to its extreme consequences by opening up a *thinking* of the *infinite*. Ciliberto is right in claiming that Bruno's philosophy was, indeed, theologically devastating but that religion is not its centre of gravity and that his doctrines were too advanced to be understood: Bruno is convinced science on itself is insufficient and it needs philosophy to break with old structures and superstitions. Bruno is as far as he can be from the anthropocentrism of the modern *subject* that, despite the advent of Copernicus, is still profoundly Ptolemaic: the power of his thinking broke through the celestial spheres and landed on the Moon to discover that *man* is not the centre of the universe, for there are no centres and that for this very reason the centre of the universe is everywhere. Whereas Heidegger sees science as obstructing any access to the *origin*, Bruno looks at it as an opportunity that he, like a novel Mercury sent by the gods, cannot lose to take the world back to that proximity that was dear to the ancients. Bruno, the man, was surely aware of his worth and never cared to hide it but it was not only the Inquisition that failed to understand Bruno. Academics themselves, who had no intention of seeing their practice of reasoning, logic and dispute, not to mention the authority of Aristotle, called into question by someone they saw as an arrogant *homunculus*. When Bruno was invited to give a series of lectures in Oxford, which had to be interrupted, the reaction, eloquently expressed by George Abbot, was the following: «Not long after returning againe, when he had more boldly than wisely, got up into the highest place of our best and most renowned

schoole, stripping up his sleeves like some Iugler, and telling us much of *chentrum* and *chirculus* and *circumferenchia* (after the pronounciation of his Country language) he undertooke among very many other matters to set on foote the opinion of Copernicus, that the earth did goe round, and the heavens did stand still; whereas in truth it was his owne head which rather did run round, and his braines did not stand stil»¹¹. If, on one hand, Heidegger deems academic practice needful of deep reforms, subsequently failing and aggravating his failure with his temporary enthusiasm for Nazism, on the other hand, Bruno is an academic of no academy for he finds no academy ready to welcome his practice, despite his ardent desires. Even the accusations of plagiarising Ficino, raised by the Oxonian professors, were misplaced: if only Bruno's ontology and cosmology had been understood they could not have been mistaken for Ficino's, still imbued with Neoplatonic hierarchies¹². What the Oxonian scholars heard were really precise citations of Ficino, due to Bruno's extraordinary *memory*, the art of which gave him fame at the court of the French king Henry III.

As Bruno's mortal flesh was incinerated, his philosophical cornerstones were overcome, long enough to give way to a modernity that was bearing the restricted horizon of an objectified and mathematised *nature*, brought forth by Descartes and Galileo. Fifty-six years after Bruno's death, after Descartes *cogito ergo sum* and after Galileo's *eppur si muove*¹³, another philosopher, in the most liberal country of the time, was to suffer a violent *damnatio memoriae* at the age of twenty-four: «cursed be he by day, and cursed be he by night; cursed be he when he lies down, and cursed be he when he rises up. Cursed be he when he goes out and cursed be he when he comes in. The Lord will not spare him; but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall

¹¹ I. D. Rowland, *Giordano Bruno. Philosopher/Heretic* [2008], p. 146.

¹² See B. P. Copenhaver & C. B. Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1992, p. 150: «An important and distinctly Neoplatonic element in the *Platonic Theology* is the hierarchy of reality that guarantees man's immortality and constitutes the order through which the soul will rise when it escapes its bodily prison».

¹³ «and yet it moves». With these words Galileo is said to have addressed the Roman Inquisition, after being forced to abjure his scientific theories showing that the earth moved around the sun.

smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven. And the Lord shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written into his book of the law»¹⁴. Thus Rabbi Morteira addressed his most brilliant pupil, Baruch Spinoza, son of a merchant and member of the Amsterdam Jewish community. Spinoza was a Jew of Portuguese descent, whose family had fled Portugal to escape anti-Jewish persecutions. Nevertheless, it seemed that even in the tolerant Netherlands, where Spinoza's family had found refuge and shelter, the philosopher did not seem to enjoy an absolute freedom of thought, due to his cultural and religious heritage. He was cursed but, if we except the failed attempt to stab him on the steps of the synagogue, was never executed. Antonio Negri attempts an explanation: «Spinoza is the anomaly. If Spinoza, atheist and cursed, does not end his days in prison or at the stake, unlike other revolutionary innovators between the 500's and the 600's, this is only due to the fact that his metaphysics represents the actual polarity of an already consolidated antagonistic power structure; in seventeenth century Holland, the development of production relations is aware of the tendency of a future of antagonism»¹⁵. Negri might as well be right in seeing Spinoza as the philosopher of mature and absolute materialism in the light of ascending capitalism, yet I believe there were other reasons that prevented him from ending up like Bruno. Spinoza's life was characterized by prudence, so much so that his personal seal, which he used on the letters directed to his intellectual friends, included the following indication in Latin: *CAUTE*¹⁶. Spinoza was a cautious man

¹⁴ As reported in S. Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell. Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2011, p. 8.

¹⁵ A. Negri, "L'anomalia selvaggia. Potere e potenza in Baruch Spinoza", in A. Negri, *Spinoza, Derive e Approdi*, Roma 2006, p. 24. My translation from the Italian: «Spinoza è l'anomalia. Se Spinoza, ateo e maledetto, non finisce le sue giornate in galera o sul rogo, a differenza di altri innovatori rivoluzionari fra il Cinquecento e il Seicento, ciò è solo indicativo del fatto che la sua metafisica rappresenta la polarità effettiva di un rapporto di forza antagonistico, già consolidato: nell'Olanda del Seicento lo sviluppo dei rapporti di produzione e delle forze produttive conosce la tendenza di un avvenire di antagonismo».

¹⁶ For a detailed study of Spinoza's seal, see F. Mignini, "Il Sigillo di Spinoza" in *La Cultura*, Year 19, n. 2 (1981), pp. 351-389.

and knew exactly what public exposure could have meant for his personal safety, which makes him very different from the ill-tempered Bruno, who did little to divert attention from himself. Nevertheless, Spinoza lived in the most liberal European country of his time as part of a Jewish community that, in Holland, had found hospitality; this very community could not repay such hospitality by letting a troublemaker stir dangerous ideas and thereby pushed him away in the aforementioned violent manner. Unlike Bruno, he never accepted an academic position¹⁷ and preferred to earn his living working on optical lenses as a turner. What Spinoza was interested in was the achievement of a good life, which he envisaged as the centre of his philosophy, whose *magnum opus* is, not surprisingly, called the *Ethics* – posthumously published in 1677. What makes him similar to Bruno is that, in order to achieve such beatitude, *man* has to reconsider his ontological position in the world and such a position is determined only by considering him from the point of view of *infinity*, an aspect underlined by scholars such as Stuart Hampshire: «Spinoza, alone of the great figures of that age, seems somehow to have anticipated modern conceptions of the scale of the universe, and of man's relatively infinitesimal place within the vast system»¹⁸. Although Hampshire captures a crucial element within Spinoza's philosophy, it is important to add that *infinity* is already present in Bruno's philosophy in a prominent position.

The notion of *modernity* is vitiated by an ambiguous relation to Humanism and the Renaissance, seen as a still immature version of the modern world, intertwined with mysticism and magic. Heidegger seems to endorse a similar assumption, failing to see the complexity and variety of Renaissance thinking and civilization; particularly in the works of Bruno – which are by no means representative of Renaissance Humanism as a whole – such a culture gave rise to a philosophical practice that, while appreciating the new development of science, did not wish to develop a philosophy that would be ancillary to science. Spinoza has a profound

¹⁷ He rejected an offer from J.L. Fabritius to take a position at Heidelberg, on the account of the Palatine Elector. His reply was that absolute freedom of philosophizing was not negotiable.

¹⁸ S. Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2005, p.123.

knowledge of Descartes and Hobbes and, while influenced by them in the composition of his works, he still bears the kind of *naturalism* that is found in Bruno, effectively expressed by his *Deus sive Natura*, the trademark of his pantheism. There is an ideal and substantial continuity between Bruno and Spinoza, of which the scorn and dangers they had to endure is only a minor detail. The demarcation line between them, represented by Descartes and the different sources and methods, does not prevent them from developing common notions that look far beyond our idea of modernity, from *infinity* to *materialism*, from their *pantheism* to their admiration and respect for *science* to which they never felt subordinated. Michael Mack reports how keen Spinoza was on the new astronomical discoveries carried out by Galileo: «As his letters to Henry Oldenburg attest, Spinoza was really interested in Galileo's work. Galileo described the Copernican universe as one that is not dependent on Aristotle's unmoved mover but on the ever-changing. [...] Similar to Spinoza, in his discussion of the sun, Galileo focused on how different aspects of nature depend on each other. Decay is thus not necessarily lethal: it could be part of nature's regenerative and ever-changing process»¹⁹. The theme of natural *vicissitude* will also be a central issue in Bruno, at the basis of his notion of *matter* and *atomism*, whereas in Spinoza this will characterize the theory of modal affects: in both cases individual entities will escape both the ancient categorization and the modern objectification. What is also interesting here, nevertheless, is that Spinoza uses Galileo's discoveries to refute Descartes, who believed the reason planets around Saturn did not move was due to Saturn itself not rotating around its own axis. His appreciation for Galileo, then, is expressed in virtue of his scientific achievements more than his metaphysical statements about a *nature* that is known and understood only mathematically, a view that Spinoza could not share. Spinoza cannot force upon *nature* a structure that depends on the partial and anthropocentric understanding of *man* understood as a *subject*, a *man* who has made himself *substance*. Spinoza's continuity with

¹⁹ M. Mack, *Spinoza and the Spectres of Modernity. The Hidden Enlightenment of Diversity from Spinoza to Freud*, Continuum, London 2010, p. 46.

Humanism is clear, for the dignity of *man* is not encountered in his mastery of *nature* but in his proximity and belonging to it. Negri pushes this point even farther in seeing the spirit of the Renaissance developing from a hand-made version to a fully accomplished one: «In Spinoza transformation is given. The humanist's workshop is no longer hand-made. Surely the spirit animating it is that of the Renaissance, similarly determining the constructive horizon of thinking, from the nevertheless great craftsmanship of Giordano Bruno or of the late Shakespeare [...]»²⁰. Still influenced by Frances Yates' interpretation of Bruno as a mystical magician, Negri seems to underestimate Bruno, for he does not speak the language of modernity *yet*. Renaissance thinking does not need the coming of *modernity* to fulfil its essence; it is a radical and multi-coloured move from medieval scholasticism and abstract logic but also an ethical alternative of freedom. The brusque interruption brought about by the Counter-Reformation and by the Cartesian method of doubt, bring man back to a centrality, which is scientifically and technologically advanced, but burdened by the old cosmic responsibility. Spinoza attempts to achieve that same freedom by affirming and constructing it within the historical and intellectual turn that had occurred. What we would like to show is an alternative reading of the Renaissance in relation to the issue of modernity and that of the *subject*, which will become increasingly evident through the course of this work, and, in order to achieve such an aim, we would like to go back to Heidegger's history of metaphysics.

²⁰ A. Negri, "L'anomalia selvaggia. Potere e potenza in Baruch Spinoza", in A. Negri, *Spinoza*, p. 35. My translation from the Italian: «In Spinoza la trasformazione è data. La bottega dell'umanista non è più artigianale. Certo, lo spirito che la anima è costruttivo, rinascimentale: ma quale distanza, già qui, ora, nello stesso collocarsi davanti al sapere, nello stesso fissare l'orizzonte costruttivo del pensiero, dal pur grande artigianato di Giordano Bruno o dell'ultimo Shakespeare [...]».

Section 2 – Intensive, Extensive

Undertaking an *ethics of thinking* means changing our inhabiting of the world by acquiring a different understanding of ourselves. There is nothing prescriptive in such an enterprise and no guidance on how to act. The urge springs from Heidegger's claim that philosophy as metaphysics has ended and that, subsequently, it is a philosophical problem to determine what *thinking* means now. We are in the uncomfortable position of being sympathetic to Heidegger and, at the same time, having to verify the meaning and the validity of his claim. If, according to Heidegger, the positing of the *subject* as the *ground* of reality is the turning point that carries metaphysics towards its exhaustion into modern science and technology, then our discourse is bound to question the role of the *subject*. We shall do that under our own perspective, though, by questioning Heidegger's history of metaphysics, which seems to neglect those very metaphysical thinkers who, at the dawn of *modernity*, did not even seem to take the *subject* into account. Bruno and Spinoza, in this sense, although bearing their own particular histories, styles and methods, provide the kind of philosophy that can show whether Western thought can still provide a way of inhabiting the world that is not founded upon the *subject* but on *man's* proximity to *nature*. We do not question Heidegger's claim that modern philosophy, understood as history of the *subject*, has come to dwell in a world where nature is objectified and subdued by technological violence. Nor do we question that science and technology, in virtue of their claim of stating objective facts about the world, close up any further possibility for thinking. Nevertheless, we do question the monolithic and almost teleological history of metaphysics provided by Heidegger.

The greatness of Heidegger, of any great philosopher, is the ability to open up questions that maintain their relevance throughout historical changes and alternate contingencies; in this sense, we could define such questions as *intensive*. This is not because such questions are somehow universally applicable. First of all, it is hard to see how the problem of the task of thinking could be relevant to a Bushman or to a

Tibetan monk. That is not because the Bushman and the Tibetan monk do not think but because thinking *as an issue* emerges in the Western tradition – although globalisation, nonetheless, makes it a more general problem, extensively speaking. Secondly, not everyone – actually, very few people – within the Western tradition itself feel such an issue to be a problem at all. In some philosophy departments a few thinkers around the world, often those acquainted with Heidegger but not only them, feel that the problem of thinking is an issue. Is the issue really urgent or we should rather take care of the climate change, poverty and the financial crisis? Is this a merely cultural and narcissistic exercise? It is an issue that embraces a whole culture, which is also progressively extending over other cultures throughout the Earth, and yet it coincides with a few individuals, each of whom expresses it in its entirety. Our problem is also the following, then: how can a totality be expressed by a singularity? That is what we shall understand as *intensive*. Such a notion will be encountered in Bruno and Spinoza as a necessary consequence of thinking *infinity*. What is *intensive* escapes determination; therefore it cannot concern poverty, finance or climate change and yet it is expressed in all of them. There is a thinking that makes poverty something to be understood as a lack of certain primary resources, the financial crisis as a lack of reciprocal trust expressed in rates and climate change as the rise of the average temperature of the Earth. The issue of why they are thus understood is a non-issue for the experts of each field because it does not solve their problems and does not make their work progress. Each field operates independently and finds its reason of existence in specialization. Philosophy itself is not necessarily characterized by putting the issue of thinking at stake; in most cases, as a matter of fact, it is not. Knowledge, in our universities, is understood *extensively*, as an ever-expanding field, divided into many independent estates. Nietzsche denounced this situation in the 19th century, followed by Heidegger in the 20th and yet, historically, they seem to have been ineffective: the spirit of *modernity* is global and stronger than ever – in spite of the ephemeral post-modern experiments – whereas *man's* inhabiting of the world becomes increasingly problematic as his role of master of nature makes him, at the

same time, enslaved to technology. Enjoying a view from the Moon, in the sense outlined in the previous section, means undertaking an *ethics of thinking*, it means looking at man *intensively*. This is one of the greatest challenge of the present work, for it amounts to holding two thoughts at once: seeing man no longer as the master of nature, for he loses any centrality in the indifference of the infinite universe; seeing man as an expression of nature in its entirety.

Neil Armstrong was not *thinking* when he took «one small step for a man» and «one giant leap for mankind» and not simply because NASA instructed him to say so. The «giant leap for mankind» is the rhetorical manifestation of the reduction of mankind, *humanity*, to scientific and technological progress. Armstrong, NASA, the political will behind them and the enthusiasm of the general public were all instructed by a *thinking* that takes *nature* to be an *object* of discovery and dominion. A spectacular extension of that dominion, such as stepping on lunar ground, means proceeding on a track that has already been traced. Descartes' *method of doubt* was able to set the *subject* as the foundational standard that ancient and medieval metaphysics could not fully determine. The *subject* is the outcome of *doubt*; it is a move that sets the standards of truth not by affirming the event of its transition but by inquiring upon its being knowable to the *subject* itself. The alternative to *doubt* is not *certainty* because *certainty* is also set against *doubt* in its claim of being *indubitable*. Modernity as *thinking* would then appear to be a destinal feature of *man's* civilization, springing from the culture of the West. In this we are puzzled by the question Kierkegaard provokingly asks through his pseudonym Johannes Climacus: «Johannes Climacus assumed that modern philosophy began with doubt and now asked how it happened, whether it was by accident or by necessity, whether this beginning was an accidental or a necessary beginning»²¹. Heidegger understands Western thought as metaphysics inscribed in a monolithic destiny of covering up the question of Being and *modernity* as its final realization in terms of *subjectivity*. We

²¹ S. Kierkegaard, "Johannes Climacus", in S. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments / Johannes Climacus*, edited and translated by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1987, p. 136.

would like to show that within Western thinking *man* has understood himself differently with respect to the historical success of the *subjective* grounding. In order to carry out this work, though, it is not sufficient to practise some history of philosophy. What is required is to endorse Heidegger's challenge and try to re-inscribe ourselves in Bruno's and Spinoza's philosophy through an effort of changing our position within *nature* and our gaze upon it. That is an enterprise of *thinking* that can only be defined as *ethical*.

The structure this enterprise has been given represents, *extensively*, a harmonic, almost geometrical array. It is divided into three Parts, each representing one great traditional area of Philosophy: Ontology, Gnosiology, Ethics. Each of these Parts is divided into three chapters, respectively devoted to Heidegger, Bruno and Spinoza. This kind of arrangement, nevertheless, is more numerical than real; it is understood only *extensively*, in its organizational and conceptual exposition. If we really wished to divide our philosophical effort into areas, then we would regress to a Cartesian tree-structured model, and its progressive foundation of knowledge from metaphysics, through physics and ethics. In the Cartesian model each part of the tree sets the standard for the following but that is not our case. Each Part can be defined as a centre of *intensity* for it does not merely expose an author's theories of Being or knowledge, it endorses a point of view on thinking that is an expression of the other two. If *ontology* were conceived as a descriptive model of the world, it would just deliver us another objectified version of nature. If *gnosiology* were an application of standards of truth based on a pre-determined ontology, then it would be nothing more than an epistemology. If *ethics* were a prescriptive model of behaviour based on a certain account of reality, then it would be nothing more than a moral recipe. If *Being* is not to be reduced to the *subject*, then the search for its truth cannot take place from an abstracted and scientific point of view, it involves on the one hand a different understanding of *man's* position as a knower and an active undertaking of that position in the world.

Part I, entitled *Ontology*, will be devoted to the problem of *ground*, its identification with the *subject* and the consequent reduction of *nature* to a mathematised *object*. In Chapter I we shall explore how the history of metaphysics begins with a loss of *memory*: the falling into oblivion of truth as *recalling* and the emergence of truth as *correspondence* will be shown to be responsible for the emergence of Being as *presence*. Furthermore, Heidegger's history of modern metaphysics as history of *subjectivity* will be shown to be incompatible with his views on Renaissance Humanism. Chapter II will explore the notion of *infinity* in Bruno, in relation to his attitude towards science and mathematics. Bruno's mathematics of composition will lead him to conceive of *nature* not as an *object* but as an animated unity that does not require a *subject* to be granted reality. Chapter III will also explore the notion of *infinity* in Spinoza, which will provide a different understanding of distinction, from numerical to real. *Substance* will be shown in its identity with the modes through the notions of *extension* and *intensity*, thereby excluding the representation of nature as a mere mechanical network of causal links.

Part II, entitled *Gnosiology*, will face the problem of knowledge in the absence of a *subject* and the consequences of the disappearance of truth as *correspondence*. In Chapter IV, knowledge will be explored as witnessing the event of truth within the open region of what Heidegger calls the *clearing*, which is covered up by epistemic knowledge, characteristic of science and technology. Actual *gnosis*, as a knowing experience of standing within the *clearing*, will be extracted from Heidegger's philosophical encounter with Heraclitus' thought and related back to the notion of *memory*. Instances of truth, understood through the notion of *clearing*, will be found in the Humanist tradition and they will lead to Bruno's theory of knowledge in Chapter V. In Bruno's philosophy the role of *man* as a knower will be related back to his composition as *being endowed with hands* and not as a *subject*. Furthermore, Bruno's notion of *shadow* will be investigated as the *latency of truth* encountered in Heidegger's *clearing*. In Chapter VI we shall explore Spinoza's theory of knowledge tackling it from the perspective of *distinction* of particular things, encountered in the

Heideggerian/Heraclitean notion of *gnosis*. We shall also explore how this relates to the Heideggerian *essence of knowing* by understanding technology from the standpoint of power.

Part III, entitled *Ethics*, will expand the notion of *dwelling* in the absence of a *subject*. For Heidegger, in Chapter VII, we shall inquire into the living relation to nature and to others. This inquiry will be carried out respectively through a joint understanding of the *thing* as the coming together of the fourfold of earth, sky, mortals and gods and the essence of politics as taking care of the gods. Chapter VIII will show Bruno's *art of memory* as the practice that shows *things* to be constituted by the coming together of infinite relations, the grasping of which takes us to the intuition of divine unity, thus relating it to the Heideggerian *fourfold*. Imagination will be a crucial issue in Bruno's art of memory, as it will be for Spinoza and his *third kind of knowledge* in Chapter IX. The supreme kind of knowledge in Spinoza is revealed as an *ethical* matter, for the intuition of *particular essences* is dependent upon man's own dwelling experience under the standpoint of eternity. The understanding of man under this new, *essential* perspective with respect to *nature* will allow for a different approach to the collective *being-with-one-another* that will appear through the notion of the *multitude*.

The challenge presented by writing on such diverse philosophers was not an easy task to face, as issues of terminology, method and different historical and cultural contexts make it difficult to undertake a homogeneous discourse and make some peculiar traits of these authors irreducible to one another. Nevertheless we decided to take on Heidegger's challenge and explore a thinking that does not require the positing of a *subject* within the Western tradition. Bruno and Spinoza, respectively born before and after the official birth of *modernity*, have sometimes been seen as contributors to, sometimes as opponents of it; they are anomalies in Heidegger's account of the history of metaphysics. The encounter with Bruno will be conducted through a large selection of his works, from his first writings of more explicit Neoplatonic flavour, such as the *De umbris idearum*, to his increasingly

materialistic ones, the *De la causa* and the Frankfurt poems. Bruno's works are sometimes written in Latin and sometimes in Italian. His sixteenth-century Italian, learned in the Kingdom of Naples, is hostile even for the modern mother tongue reader and his writings are a flourishing canvas of images, allegories and dramas that mirror his whole philosophical quest. As far as Spinoza is concerned, we shall mainly refer to his *magnum opus*, the *Ethics*, which reflects our treatment of *ontology*, *gnosiology* and *ethics* as a globally *ethical* matter. We shall also occasionally refer to his epistles and to the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the late *Political Treatise* – mainly concerning the notion of *multitude*. In none of the three cases, of course, will we be able to address the complete work of the author, for it is not our intention to give a full account of their philosophy. Distortion, which in its most innocent connotation means interpretation, will nevertheless take place, for we are here to understand how significant these authors are to us and from this encounter neither we nor they can emerge “unharméd”.

PART I

Ontology

Chapter I – Ground and Subjectivity

Section 1 – Thinking as Μνημοσύνη

Memory reveals by retaining. In Greek mythology Μνημοσύνη is mother to the Muses and is therefore the source of any creative production, which amounts to saying that looking back to the *origin* is essentially a productive process. *Memory* does not proceed philologically, *i.e.* it does not treat what it retains as an object of study. It is an effort to turn *thinking* away from *Being as presence*²² where presencing is guaranteed by an objectified *ground*, along the lines traced by Heidegger but directing our efforts to the anomalies characterizing the history of Philosophy. At university we are taught to approach a philosophical text *critically*, which I have always taken to mean something along the lines of measuring a philosopher's thinking against a *method* apprehended within the academic experience. Nevertheless, critical thinking intended as a dialectic between conflicting arguments, as fashionable as it is in many Philosophy departments, is a valuable technical support but is not sufficient in order to *think*, meaning that it allows us, at best, to have a clearer idea of the validity of a conceptual construction and take sides as to which method conforms better to our notion of *scientific*. Questions about whether we should practise abortion, problems such as “linguistic injustice” or even the value of the Higgs' boson discovery and its impact on the model of the universe's birth, are dealt with through the vocabulary and the methodology of the natural and social

²² «For since the beginning of Philosophy, and with that beginning, the Being of beings has shown itself as the ground (*archè, aition*, principle). The ground is that from which beings as such are what they are in their becoming, perishing and persisting as something that can be known, handled and worked upon. As the ground, Being brings beings in each case to presencing. The ground shows itself as presence. The present of presence consists in the fact that it brings what is present each in its own way to presence. In accordance with the given type of presence, the ground as the character of grounding as the ontic causation of the actual, the transcendental making possible of the objectivity of objects, the dialectical mediation of the movement of absolute spirit and of the historical process of production, and the will to power positing values». From M. Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”, in M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, edited by D. Farrel Krell, Routledge, Oxon 1993, p. 432.

sciences and virtually do not require any philosophical contribution. As important to our lives as they are, such issues are already inscribed in a *thinking* whose tools we are given as we are educated in our Western schools or during public and academic debates: thus, they require us to be intelligent, educated, informed and critical students, scholars or citizens. In these sense we are owned by the very issues we address with so much expertise. *Memory* carries a different contribution: its way of demonstration is *practice* and the outcome of *practice* is *creation*, which derives from the re-interpreting of the world through *memory*, whereas *analysis* needs the world to be a stable and unchangeable *object*. Let us consider Fellini's *Satyricon*, where the Roman world is represented as a piece of science fiction, as if the Romans were Martians, but where the *truth* of the director's encounter with the Roman world emerges from the *shadows* of his characters. We shall seek to account for a particular truth by encountering it on the field: the state of Philosophy. Enacting *memory* means reactivating the *origin* – and Fellini's example is particularly coherent – not by representing it monumentally but by projecting it into a future perspective of philosophical renovation. We cannot do this without Heidegger, who paved the way in this sense but ignored those anomalies that do not fit into his history of metaphysics and that can contribute to his *thinking* project. In order to do this we have to walk along Heidegger's path and design peripheral and secondary turns in order for the main road to be revealed as just one of the many practicable paths.

The necessity of enacting a practice of *memory* springs from Heidegger's claim that Philosophy has come to its *end*. Surely we should qualify this claim. Nevertheless, we cannot help wondering *how* we are supposed to deal with it if Philosophy has come to an *end*. In *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, an important lecture delivered in 1964, Heidegger draws our attention on how to deal with such an apparent paradox:

Philosophy is metaphysics. Metaphysics thinks beings as a whole – the world, man, God – with respect to Being, with respect to the belonging together of beings in Being. Metaphysics thinks beings as beings in the manner of a representational thinking that

gives grounds. [...] What characterizes metaphysical thinking, which seeks out the ground for beings, is the fact that metaphysical thinking, starting out from what is present, represents it in its presence and thus exhibits it as grounded by its ground. What is meant by the talk about the end of philosophy? We understand the end of something all too easily in the negative sense as mere cessation, as the lack of continuation, perhaps even as decline and impotence. In contrast, what we say about the end of philosophy, means the completion of metaphysics. However, completion does not mean perfection, as a consequence of which philosophy would have to have attained the highest perfection at its end.²³

Heidegger's diagnosis is precise: he is facing the whole Western tradition, from our most advanced sciences to our everyday understanding of the world. The *end* is not an element of *duration*: metaphysics has not reached its aim, which is the grounding of all knowledge on a firm base; it has exhausted itself by its definitive translation into *modern science* and its *technological* drift:

We forget that already in the age of Greek philosophy a decisive characteristic of philosophy appears: the development of the sciences within the field that philosophy opened up. The development of the sciences is at the same time their separation from philosophy and the establishment of their independence. This process belongs to the completion of philosophy.²⁴

Heidegger posits a problem that is potentially easy to ignore: we have evidence that technology can actually solve those problems that it creates; we can refine our predictions about the environment and about the economy, scientific research has known no boundaries yet. There seems to be little reason to worry if Philosophy, as such, has become irrelevant to most people. Even universities often promote philosophy as a good training in analytical skills that offer their services to the natural and the social sciences, thus playing a subordinate role. Alternatively, the general public sees it as an enterprise of erudition or as an appendix of poetry and literature. If we reflect upon Heidegger's statement that «metaphysics thinks beings as a whole – the world, man, God», we can understand why Western civilization has come to a point where ignoring the issue Heidegger posits means covering up the fact that the

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

only ground we can provide for our culture is technological strength. Metaphysics has found its ground in its very outcome – the modern sciences – and has fulfilled its claims for universality through the force of its technology, thus making notions such as *man*, *the world* and *God* the only possible ones and Western *man* the keeper of such unitary thought, which, nevertheless, is untenable. This is what Heidegger means when he affirms: «The end of philosophy means the beginning of the world civilization that is based upon Western European thinking»²⁵. We can hear the echo of the late Husserl who, in the *Crisis*, illuminates and informs this point better than Heidegger himself:

Philosophy and science would accordingly be the historical movement through which universal reason, “inborn” in humanity as such, is revealed.

This would be the case if the as yet unconcluded movement [of modern philosophy] had *proved* to be the entelechy, properly started on the way to pure realization, or if reason had in fact become manifest, fully conscious of itself in its own essential form *i.e.* the form of a universal philosophy which grows through consistent apodictic insights and supplies its own norms through an apodictic method. Only then could it be decided whether European humanity bears within itself an absolute idea, rather than being merely an empirical anthropological type like “China” or “India”; it could be decided whether the spectacle of the Europeanization of all other civilizations bears witness to the rule of an absolute meaning, one which is proper to the sense, rather than to a historical non-sense, of the world.²⁶

Neither Husserl nor any other thinker has provided that necessary theoretical grounding. We can positively claim that modern philosophy has anything but *proved* to be apodictic if not by its historical supremacy derived from the force of its technology, thus leading the anthropological types *China* or *India* to adopt and adapt its ready-made concepts and theories. We are not talking of spontaneous cultural contamination, we are talking of a violent imposition. I have allowed myself to use such extreme words on the account of the fact that the Western quest for unitary thought is indeed at the root of our *thinking* and is theoretically unresolved and

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

²⁶ E. Husserl, *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology. An introduction to phenomenological philosophy*, translated by D. Carr, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1970, p. 16.

insoluble. In *The Infinite Conversation*, Blanchot reports and interprets the story of Admetus, the founder of *dialogue*, thus capturing the problem we have introduced here: «I think of what Apollo affirms when, through the mouth of the poet Bacchylides, he says to Admetus: “*You are a mere mortal; therefore your mind must harbour two thoughts at once.*” In other words, a multiplicity of speech in the simultaneity of one language»²⁷. Unitary thought belongs to the gods and yet Admetus, on the divine model, wishes to resolve the problem by establishing a dialogue between two equals: «It is because dialogue is founded on the reciprocity of words and the equality of speakers; only two “I”s can establish a relation of dialogue, each one acknowledging in the second “I” the same power to speak as his own, each considering himself equal to the other and seeing in the other nothing than another “Self”. This is the paradise of decorous idealism. But we know, first of all, that there is almost no sort of equality in our societies. [...] All speech is a word of command, of terror, of seduction, of resentment, flattery or aggression; all speech is violence [...]»²⁸. The absolute *I*, derived from mutual recognition, which finds in Fichte and Hegel its supreme theorists, is indeed a form of violence. The message Blanchot is delivering is that Western man reduces the irreducible problem of *difference* to a problem of uniformity and conformism; that is the reason, we say, why the «anthropological types “China” and “India”» are feared and considered only once they have been reduced to interlocutors within *our own dialogue*, reduced to uniformity and thus escaping the warning of Apollo, that humans are not gods and thus have to bear two thoughts at once, not mediate between them, else «in the interrelational space, dialogue, and the equality dialogue presupposes, tend to do nothing other than increase entropy, just as dialectical communication, requiring two antagonistic poles charged with contrary words and provoking a common current through this opposition, is itself, after brilliant bursts, destined to die out in entropic

²⁷ M. Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, translation and foreword by Susan Hanson, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London 2011, p. 80.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

identity»²⁹. The great Western civilization and its achievements have been reached through the suppression of *difference*, thus bearing the seed of a self-dissolution within the indifference of unitary thought. This happens politically – Husserl is rather prophetic about China and India – but also within the academic world, which bears the same seeds. This is exactly the reason why I have therefore embraced the notion of the *end of philosophy*. Heidegger, in this sense, leads the way but we shall see that the monolithic history of metaphysics he provides is sometimes an obstacle, as the access to that lost multiplicity has to be found within Western thought by recalling to *memory* the secondary paths that have been abandoned or truncated.

At the dawn of metaphysics, Plato gives *memory* a prominent role in *thinking*: in the *Phaedo*³⁰, as a matter of fact, recollection is presented as the access to those forms that enable humans to acquire knowledge through everyday sensory interaction with objects, a doctrine whose premises had been laid out in the *Meno*. *Memory* constitutes, then, the access to the disembodied soul, to man's noblest and *eternal* part. Nevertheless, if we go beyond the mythical image of the soul freed from the body, provided by Plato, we realize that in Plato's doctrine the *question of Being* still resonates, the problem of how man can say that something *is*: «Our sense perceptions must surely make us realize all that we perceive through them is striving to reach that

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ «Therefore, if we had this knowledge, we knew before birth and immediately after not only the Equal but the Greater and the Smaller and all such things, for our present argument is no more about the Equal than about the Beautiful itself, the Good itself, the Just, the Pious and, as I say about all those things we mark with the seal of “what it is”, both when we are putting questions and answering them. So we must have acquired knowledge of them all before we were born.

That is so.

If, having acquired this knowledge in each case, we have not forgotten it, we remain knowing and have and have knowledge throughout our life, for to know is to acquire knowledge, keep it and not lose it. Do we call the losing of knowledge forgetting?

Most certainly, Socrates, he said.

But, I think, if we acquired this knowledge before birth, then lost it at birth, and then later by the use of our senses in connection with those objects we mentioned, we recovered the knowledge we had before, would not what we call learning be the recovery of our own knowledge, and we are right to call this recollection?

Certainly». *Phaedo* 75C-E. From Plato, “Phaedo”, in Plato, *Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper, Hackett, Indianapolis 1997, p. 66.

which is Equal but falls short of it»³¹. Again, a witness of man's duality tending towards unitary thought; just as in Admetus' case, *difference* can only be made sense of by appealing to an inborn form of the Equal – Western thinking is in the cradle. In this case, though, the appeal to *memory* complicates matters as it gives in to the fact that the reconciliation of our duality is kept in the divine sphere, in which we participate by having a soul but which we cannot access completely until we have a body. In other words, the multiplicity of *beings* makes sense only insofar as we distinguish them through an act of recollection. As such, Plato can be considered a metaphysical thinker if and only if we take his doctrine of the soul in a modern and Cartesian sense, thus objectifying the body and all those beings the body interacts with. It is the role of *memory* that prevents Plato's doctrine from crashing into a schematic metaphysical model because *memory* is the tension that constitutes man's *nearness* to beings and which keeps them distinguished in their multiplicity. In Plato, *dialogue* is not a dispute of opposing arguments where two interlocutors recognize each other's equality – and Socrates' irony constitutes evidence for this – it is the manifestation of the irreducible difference that makes *thinking* possible. When Plato claims that there must be an inborn form of the Equal in order to recognize that a stick is a stick and such a form can only be activated through recollection, he is saying that man's being amongst beings is not that of a perceiving animal amongst inert objects; yet, that inborn form has to be recollected through the interaction of the senses with the beings themselves. *Memory*, then, is the *thinking* that preserves the reciprocal belonging of man and *beings* to *Being*: *beings* are not seen as objects, they are seen as something whose coming into being has to be recalled. This should be compared with Heidegger's affirmation, found in *What is called Thinking?*, which provides an account of *memory*:

Memory, in the sense of human thinking that recalls, dwells where everything that gives food for thought is kept in safety. We shall call it the "keeping". It harbours and conceals what gives us food for thought. "Keeping" alone *gives* freely what is to-be-

³¹ *Ibid.*

thought, what is most thought-provoking, it frees it *as a gift*. But the keeping is not something that is apart from and outside of what is most thought-provoking. The keeping itself is the most thought-provoking thing, itself is its mode of giving – giving itself which ever and always is food for thought. Memory, as the human recall of what must be thought about, consists in the “keeping” of what is most thought-provoking.³²

Loss of memory, then, threatens the very possibility of thinking, so much so that, a few pages later, Heidegger claims that «the history of Western thought begins, not by thinking what is most thought-provoking, but by letting it remain forgotten. Western thought, thus begins with an omission, perhaps even a failure. [...] The beginning of Western thought is not the same as its origin. [...] The origin keeps itself concealed in the beginning»³³. We can interpret this claim in the light of the fact that Western thought renounces the mnemonic effort of *thinking* by covering up under a metaphysical structure that which has to be remembered, serving somehow as grounding for the physical one: «the ground has the character of ontic causation of the actual, the transcendental making possible of the objectivity of objects»³⁴. That is how «Plato’s thinking remains decisive in its sundry forms. Platonism is metaphysics»³⁵. Nevertheless, Platonism is metaphysics which *recalls* an origin that is placed and identified precisely within the realm of our disembodied souls, in virtue of the fact that our senses could not otherwise recognize that a stick is a stick or that a horse is a horse. The abandonment of the mnemonic effort amounts to decreasing the tension, it means a definitive objectification of the ground as ὑποκείμενον, the ultimate translation of *Being* as *presence* and the beginning of the metaphysical adventure.

In Plato «”The good” grants the appearing of the visible form in which whatever is present has its stability in that which it is»³⁶, which means that it guarantees the

³² M. Heidegger, *What is called Thinking?*, translated by J. Glenn Gray, Harper Perennial, New York 2004, pp. 150-151.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

³⁴ See n. 22.

³⁵ From M. Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”, in M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p. 433.

³⁶ M. Heidegger, “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth”, in M. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, edited by W. McNeill Cambridge University Press, New York 2007, p. 176.

presencing of *beings*, and yet this is vitiated, in the crucial myth of the cave, by a substantial ambiguity which concerns the essence of truth, where *unconcealment* (ἀλήθεια) is still present but conflates into *correctness* (ὀρθότα), which amounts to *correspondence* with the *idea* of the Good. *Unconcealment*, which amounts to revelation through retention, characterizes *truth* in the traditional Greek sense but is now subordinated to *correctness*. Its being congruent with the idea of the Good guarantees the *unhiddenness* of what comes to the fore, what is *present*. Nevertheless, such a relationship of correspondence between *truth* and *Being* hides the very uncovering of the hidden, thus making *presence* a relation of cause and effect, and shutting off *memory*, which keeps and frees what is «most thought-provoking», namely *unconcealment*. *Unconcealment* is forgotten if Being is understood as *presence*, which progressively turns, through Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Scholasticism, into *adaequatio intellectus ad rem*. On the other hand, *memory* is what makes possible the recalling of *unconcealment*, as opposed to its crystallization into *presence*. If *unconcealment* as such is the transition of *truth* from what is *kept* to what is *free*, then *truth* as *correctness* represents the denial of such a transition; in practical terms, *truth* as *correctness* abstracts *beings* by turning them into isolated objects. The very possibility for *Being* to let beings appear is granted by the fact that beings *are* in virtue of *Being* revealing itself through its own concealing. This revelation is constituted by nothing but the *beings* themselves: *Being* retreats and is kept in safety for *beings* to *be*. The ambiguity in relation to Plato permeates the notion of the *beginning* of Western thought, where Plato, who is not *stricto sensu* a metaphysical thinker yet, paves the way for metaphysics itself. The practice of *memory* is the residual awareness of an *origin* as something that needs to be brought forth not through a form of contemplation or of strict argumentation but in virtue of a constant work of recollection which transits through the senses. In an earlier work of 1933, Heidegger had suggested a representation of the Platonic ambiguity through the myth of the cave:

The ideas give the appearance of beings, that is, their *Being*. Becoming free for the light means making the effort to authentically understand what things are, *binding oneself to the essential law of things* on the basis on which we first grasp things in their Being-such-and-such.

The freer we become and the more originally we bind ourselves to the essential laws of things, the nearer we come to beings and the more we *come to be*. In each case, the degree and the extent of human *actuality* depends on the degree and greatness of human *freedom*. This freedom is not lack of restraint; rather, it is all the greater the more originary and broad the *binding* of man is, the more that in his comportment, man sets his Being back into the *roots* of his Dasein, into the fundamental domains into which he is thrown as a historical being.³⁷

In Heidegger's interpretation, the *nearness* to the *origin* translates into the coessentiality of *knowledge* and *freedom*, thus implicitly revealing the significance of the Platonic paradox: that metaphysics itself is a historical occurrence of *Dasein* and «belongs to the “nature of human being”»³⁸. The error Heidegger denounces at the dawn of Philosophy is the *forgetting* of the essence of metaphysics as the obliteration of such *nearness*. That is the reason we are not truly convinced by criticisms such as Bernd Magnus', who holds that Heidegger fails to capture the essence of Plato's truth theory: «Clearly the philosopher-king's discerning gaze is not made “right” merely by *corresponding* to its object, for this would be true also of opinion: *doxa*. The “rightness” of cognition is determined by something which is antecedently real; namely, the object *in its truth*»³⁹. Magnus may well be right in saying that correspondence also applies to opinion but he misses the crucial point that what is «antecedently real», the object in its truth, is such only in virtue of the fact that it is an objectified standard of truth. The particular *being* in its actuality is lost in favour of such standard, unless the *mnemonic* tension, which is what keeps the belonging of the *being* to its *Being*, is maintained. The tension is progressively reduced and «binding oneself to the essential law of things» becomes impossible. The difference between a stick and another stick is abstracted as “stickness” in order to make sense

³⁷ M. Heidegger, *Being as Truth*, transl. by G. Fried and R. Polt, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2010, p. 125.

³⁸ M. Heidegger, “What is metaphysics?”, in M. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, edited by W. McNeill, Cambridge University Press, New York 2007, p. 96.

³⁹ B. Magnus, *Heidegger's Metahistory of Philosophy. Amor Fati, Being and Truth*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1970, p. 80.

of the fact that we recognize two different objects both as sticks: *memory* is thus replaced by the application of some inborn form of the Equal. It is this form of the Equal that gets in the way between *beings* and their *Being*, annihilating the *mnemonic* tension in the same way as Admetus escapes the condition of bearing two thoughts at once. Metaphysics, if we interpret Heidegger, is the breaking and the solution of this tension, where *ideas* are no longer characterized as the source of *unconcealment* but as a transcendent «object in its truth», as Magnus would have it. Magnus, who accuses Heidegger of building a metahistory of Philosophy vitiated by his own ontology, supposing to give a *historical* – and not *metahistorical* – account of Plato, objectifies the *ground* from a strong and fully developed *a posteriori* metaphysical point of view, which can hardly be present in the development of Platonic thinking. It would be as if we claimed that a classic such as *Ben Hur* were truer to the Roman world than Fellini's *Satyricon*: in the case of *Ben Hur* the pretence of a supposedly historical and faithful reproduction does not constitute a practice of *memory* as it reproduces a present view *in its presence*, which tells us nothing about the Romans if not what we wish the Romans to be like; in the case of the *Satyricon*, Fellini's mnemonic act captures the Roman world together with the irreducible distance from it through a creative act, which treats the Romans as if they were Martians, thus representing their truth in their *difference*. That is an instance of Μνημοσύνη as mother of the Muses.

The crystallization of Platonic *ideas* as an objectified *ground*, just like Admetus' effort to reduce *difference* to equality, is thus perfectly coherent with Husserl's synthesis of the crisis of the West. The enacting of the reduction of such *difference* within *thinking* itself, and the consequent obliteration of *difference* in worldly affairs, is translated into technological violence and supremacy over the other "anthropological types". *Technology*, which we shall discuss in Part II, buries questioning under its efficiency and practically translates the *unitary thought* that cannot be achieved in *thinking*. *Technology* has no *memory*, since it needs to obliterate what came before as old and useless; it is the utmost affirmation of

presence and it only possesses itself as a parameter. This is why the recognition of China and India as interlocutors only happens once they are technologically equal and their *difference* has also been *culturally* cancelled. The *ground* has become common, not in virtue of a successful theoretical effort, but of its technological projection. In metaphysics, then, what is *irreducible* is thus *forgotten*. Similarly, what remains of *truth* as *unconcealment*, which is, as a matter of fact, *irreducible*, is also forgotten in its vicissitudinal event. What is at stake here is that, whereas *unconcealment* can account for the belonging of beings in *Being*, as Heidegger would have it, *ground* can account, at most, for a transcendental categorial relation between Being and beings, a relation of utmost universality or of mere and empty self-evidence.⁴⁰

Section 2 - The Renaissance Anomaly

The obliteration of *memory* has taken us to the objectification of *ground*. *Modernity*, as we know it, has its source in a particular interpretation of such objectified *ground*. Despite the waves of postmodernism and even of post-postmodernism we have experienced in the academic, intellectual and artistic world, I believe our time has not fully dealt with *modernity* as such and we are yet to appreciate its genesis and its omissions. *Ground* is the key factor in such an appreciation. It is through a radical transformation of ὑποκείμενον, operated by Descartes through his methodological doubt, that *ground* is turned into *subjectivity* in virtue of its being indubitable. Cassirer expressed a clear view of how he saw the Cartesian move: «And thus we date the beginning of modern philosophy from Descartes' principle of the *Cogito*. This beginning appears not to have been historically mediated; it rests, as Descartes himself felt and said, upon a free act of the mind. With one blow, with an independent, unique decision, the mind rejects the

⁴⁰ See M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Blackwell, Oxford 2004, pp. 22-23.

whole of the past and must now go along the new path towards thoughtful reflection upon itself. This is not a question of gradual evolution but of a genuine ‘revolution’ in the mode of thought»⁴¹. What is interesting is that Cassirer argues that the bold Cartesian thinking act was, indeed, prepared by the antecedent Renaissance culture and philosophy which, due to its inorganic, disorganized and mystical nature, failed to reach the full maturity of the subject-object problem. Our reading of the Renaissance in relation to the issue of modernity and that of the *subject* is different and we shall show it starting from Heidegger’s history of metaphysics. This may appear as an odd move because Heidegger, from a philosophical point of view, has little more than contempt for the Renaissance: «We encounter the first humanism in Rome: it therefore remains in essence a specifically Roman phenomenon, which emerges from the encounter of Roman civilization with the culture of late Greek civilization. The so-called Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Italy is a *renascentia romanitatis*»⁴². The Renaissance, according to Heidegger, is a phenomenon that promotes the revival of an era and a thinking that is already far from the *origin* and is endowed with a strongly established view on man and nature. This may be true to an extent but causes Heidegger to ignore almost two centuries of flourishing philosophical thinking between Scholasticism and Modernity. And it is precisely Heidegger’s criticism of Modernity that will take us back into the arms of the Renaissance.

In order to evaluate the relevance of the Renaissance we shall move back to the problem of *ground* and point out that Heidegger and Cassirer have a very different reading of the Cartesian *Cogito*. Heidegger sees the subjective turn of Descartes as the beginning of a thinking that resolves the metaphysical project into *subjectivity* as *ground*, which is functional to the development of the modern sciences and their technological drift. Furthermore, his history of metaphysics sees a constant and

⁴¹ E. Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, translated with an introduction by M. Domandi, Chicago University Press [1963], Chicago 2010, p. 123.

⁴² M. Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”, from M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, pp. 224-225.

coherent development of *subjectivity* from Descartes, through Hegel and all the way to Husserl:

With Descartes' *ego cogito*, says Hegel, philosophy steps on firm ground for the first time, where it can be at home. If the *fundamentum absolutum* is attained with the *ego cogito* as the distinctive *subiectum*, this means that the subject is the *hypokeimenon* transferred to consciousness, is what truly presences; and this, vaguely enough, is called "substance", in traditional terminology.

When Hegel explains in the Preface (ed. Hoffmeister, p. 19) "The true (in philosophy) is to be understood and expressed, not as substance but, just as much, as subject", then this means: the Being of beings, the presence of what is present, is manifest and thus complete presence only when it becomes present as such for itself in the absolute idea. But, since Descartes, *idea* means *perceptio*. Being's coming to itself occurs in speculative dialectic. Only the movement of the idea, the method, is the matter itself. The call "to the thing itself" requires a philosophical method appropriate to its matter. [...] A hundred years later, the call "to the thing itself" again is heard in Husserl's treatise *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*.⁴³

Whereas Descartes, for Cassirer, through an independent intellectual act, brings to fruition a process that developed progressively throughout the Renaissance, Heidegger explains the *Cogito* as a complete change of perspective. The *subiectum*, which in Scholasticism constituted the actual *object*, the *res* to which the *intellectus* had to achieve its *adaequatio*, comes now to coincide with the *ego*, thus generating the modern *subject*, which conflates with *ground*, thus becoming itself ὑποκείμενον. Furthermore, the newly constituted subject-object relation turns from an *ontological* to an *epistemological* standpoint as *ideas* become *perceptions*: bodies, matter or *res extensa* in general, are only insofar as they are *known*, i.e. insofar as they are an object of *science*. That is the reason why *method* is the key to *modernity*: it is central to the development of the modern sciences as we know them and to the progressive loss of the unity of knowledge.

Despite the difference of their positions, both Cassirer and Heidegger fail to see something in their understanding of the Renaissance. Cassirer argues that the Renaissance could not be considered fully *modern* due to a number of shortcomings

⁴³ From M. Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking", in M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p. 438.

and ambiguities that prevented it from becoming truly scientific, such as the constant presence of *magic* and *mysticism*⁴⁴. Such a judgement appears rather hasty if we consider that a great amount of the Renaissance intellectual production is foreign to any magical or mystical practice and still close to Aristotelian positions, of which Bruni and Pomponazzi are important examples⁴⁵. Furthermore, Cassirer seems to project, *a posteriori*, a modern point of view on the Renaissance as if its historical and philosophical task were to resolve the subject-object tension, describing different attempts to achieve an empirical and purely scientific practice: «[...] the Quattrocento and the Cinquecento had to steer a different course. Theirs was the task of making the concept of nature independent and of securing for it a strong, strictly ‘objective’ character. When this had been accomplished, one could – indeed, one had to – again raise the question of the relationship of this new realm of nature to the world of ‘consciousness’ and ‘spirit’. Once again, the ‘correspondence’, the ‘harmony’ of these two worlds is sought; but now it presupposes the autonomy and the independent determination of each member of the relationship. It seems manifest that the Renaissance discovered and championed this independence of nature by means of immediate, *sensible-empirical observation*»⁴⁶. If this amounts to the rejection of the old Aristotelian categories and the adoption of a direct relationship with nature – which was the case with authors such as Bruno – we agree with Cassirer, but affirming that this presupposes the autonomy of each member of the man-nature

⁴⁴ «The Renaissance philosophy of nature never succeeds in removing magic from its path. In the writings of *Giordano Bruno*, the problems of ‘natural magic’ take up so much room that they threaten to stifle the speculative-philosophical problems. And *Campanella*, who in the whole tendency of his doctrines of nature and of knowledge seems to come closest to Telesio, gives his main work on natural philosophy the title *De sensu rerum et magia*». From E. Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 147-148.

⁴⁵ As Copenhaver and Schmitt testify: «Bruni saw Aristotle almost uniquely as an authority on moral philosophy; Lefèvre used him as a stepping-stone to divinity; but Pomponazzi’s Aristotelianism developed entirely within the framework of natural philosophy, assuming that one understands natural philosophy to include the psychological and epistemological issues raised by Aristotle’s *De anima* and, by extension, the metaphysical, ethical, and theological consequences of interpreting that work in a Christian context». From B. P. Copenhaver and C. B. Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1992, p. 105.

⁴⁶ E. Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 145.

relationship is hard to sustain for the Renaissance as a whole. Cassirer himself, in the previous chapter of his work, confirms such an attitude towards nature, thus contradicting himself: «There is a decidedly ethical stand even in the natural philosophy and cosmology of Bruno, a thinker whom we are accustomed to considering the typical representative of the ‘naturalistic’ tendencies of the Renaissance. Through the heroic passion that ignites within him, man becomes equal to nature and able to comprehend its infinity and its incommensurability»⁴⁷. How Cassirer can claim that such premises pave the way for the achievement of a mature subject-object dichotomy is unclear, if the only justification for the alleged failure of the Renaissance in meeting such a goal is the presence of magic and mysticism. In Part III of this work we shall see how *magic* is not a mere esoteric leftover of times ruled by fear and superstition but an integrated part of philosophy aiming at building a close relationship between *man* and *nature*, which will be brusquely interrupted by the rise of the *Cogito*. That will also be Spinoza’s aim, yet through a completely different method. One last point we should underline in order to provide a fair sketch of Cassirer’s view is his praise of Leonardo da Vinci who, according to him, is a direct precursor of Galileo in his objective look upon *nature* – both in the artistic and in the scientific realms – and, most of all, in his use of *mathematics* as the main access to *nature*: «Leonardo’s true intellectual greatness lies in this formulation of the *problem*, of the ‘theme’ of exact science. Reason is the immanent, unbreakable law governing nature. Sense, sensation, or the immediate feeling for life can no longer serve as the means by which we assimilate nature and discover her secret. Only thought proves to be truly equal to nature; only ‘the principle of sufficient reason’, which Leonardo considers a principle of mathematical explanation. Now, we can begin to grasp and appreciate the significance of Leonardo’s influence upon Galileo»⁴⁸. At first glance, it seems, then, that the Renaissance hosts two different attitudes, one of which will be particularly fruitful once it is elevated to *system* and

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

method, which is exactly what Descartes does. Nevertheless, we suspect that even in Leonardo da Vinci's case Cassirer advances and provides a retrospective view that is distorted by an excessive faith in the inevitable destiny of *modernity*. If it is true, on the one hand, that both Leonardo and Galileo fight against what was a purely speculative view of science, typical of Scholasticism, *ontologically* it is still up to *nature* to provide the *forms* of the true and not to the *rational subject*. This is perfectly coherent with Leonardo's attitude towards *nature*, which gives priority to the *saper vedere* [Italian for 'being able to see'], an attitude that is diametrically opposed to the Cartesian objectification of nature. *Mathematics* is, indeed, another crucial point, as we shall see in the next chapter; in fact, depending on which ontological setting it is inscribed in, its hold upon *nature* greatly differs. This element makes a smooth succession of Galilean science to Renaissance maths not so obvious.

Heidegger's critique of Galilean mathematics, as a matter of fact, provides a rather striking point against Cassirer's pacific continuity between the Renaissance and *modernity*, even though Heidegger does not even take the former into consideration. Heidegger speaks of an actual Galilean *mathematical project*, which deeply contradicts a view of nature belonging to Leonardo. Galileo's observation of nature is not merely counterintuitive, it openly contradicts the observed facts. Heidegger reports the famous example of the fall of two bodies characterized by different mass, which should fall equally fast and touch the ground together, if dropped from the same height – the leaning tower of Pisa, for instance. During the famous experiment, the bodies did not fall with the same speed and apparently disproved Galileo's theory. Heidegger illustrates the event as follows:

Both Galileo and his opponents saw the same "fact". But they interpreted the same fact differently and made the same happening visible to themselves in different ways. Indeed, what appeared for them as the essential fact and truth was something different. Both thought something along with the same appearance but they thought something different, not only about the single case, but fundamentally, regarding the essence of a body and its motion. What Galileo thought in advance about motion was the

determination that the motion of every body is uniform and rectilinear, when every obstacle is excluded, but that it also changes uniformly when an equal force affects it.⁴⁹

Galileo openly bends *nature* to the abstractions of the intellect, against those *juxta propria principia* that are in contrast with the Aristotelian categories, without needing to turn nature into an *object*. In Galileo's system the truth does not lie in nature, it lies in the *perceptio*, perfectly in tune with the Cartesian *Cogito*: the *man-nature* relationship is a purely *epistemological* one but it is also a *hierarchical* one if the *substratum* where truth has to be found is no longer *nature* but the *intellect*:

The mathematical is, as *mente concipere*, a project of thingness which, as it were, skips over things. The project first opens a domain where things – *i.e.* facts – show themselves.

In this projection is posited that which things are taken as, what and how they are to be evaluated beforehand. Such evaluation is called in Greek *axioō*. The anticipating determinations and assertions in the project are *axiōmata*. [...] Insofar as every science and cognition is expressed in propositions, the cognition that is taken and posited in the mathematical project is of such a kind as to set things upon their foundations in advance. The *axioms* are fundamental propositions.⁵⁰

Galileo's method, then, cannot be defined as experimental in the sense of Francis Bacon: Galileo is the true founder of modern science in virtue of a method that projects *subjectivity* upon an *objective* nature, measured and predicted according to a number of axiomatic assumptions and the mathematical model. As Galileo himself affirms in the *Saggiatore*: «[...] philosophy is written in the great book of nature, which lies constantly before our eyes, but which no one can read unless he has first learned to understand the ciphers in which it is composed, *i.e.* the mathematical figures and their relationships»⁵¹. The axiom lies in the affirmation that nobody can read nature without the fundamental mathematical tool according to which the book of *nature* is written: it is obvious that every observation is necessarily filtered through

⁴⁹ M. Heidegger, 'Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics', in M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p. 290.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁵¹ G. Galilei, *Il Saggiatore* [1623], Edizione Nazionale VI, p. 232. English translation from Italian by M. Domandi in E. Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 156.

the previously projected mathematical interpretation of nature, which excludes any alternative reading. The *ontological* foundation of such truth can be nothing but the *rational subject* in which mathematics finds its origin, which drives the *ground* to shift from a *nature* in which *man* participates as a whole to one where *man* suffers an irreconcilable dualism as *nature*, together with *man*'s own body, become *objects*. Thus the *nearness* of Renaissance *man* to *nature* is, once and for all, broken.

The *ontological* correspondent of the Galilean move, the Cartesian *cogito*, applies a similar technique in order to legitimize the methodological doubt. The standards for establishing the *sum* inferred from the *cogitatio* are just as axiomatic as Galileo's assumptions about *nature*. Ricoeur's comment on Heidegger's critique of the *cogito* underlines this aspect particularly well: «First, the structure is the denial of the priority of the self-positing or of the self-asserting of the *cogito*. This is not to be taken in the sense that the question as question would imply a degree of uncertainty and of doubt lacking in the *cogito*. This opposition is still an epistemological one. An objection against the Cartesian *cogito* will be precisely that it starts with a previous model of certitude and places itself on the epistemological basis, which has been raised as a mirror of certitude. Thus the structure of the question is not defined by its epistemological degree, so to speak, or by the fact that if we raise a question it is because we are not certain. No. What is important in the question is that it is ruled by the questioned – by the thing about which the question is asked»⁵². Heidegger himself, Ricoeur argues, starts off his philosophical adventure in *Sein und Zeit* from the *questioner* itself, the one for whom Being is an issue – *Dasein* – and for whom the *question* of Being has been *forgotten*. Again, *memory* is the dividing line between Descartes' and Heidegger's approach: Descartes founds his thinking on the bracketing of all prior knowledge and the certainty of what remains indubitable, that is the *questioner* himself, who considers himself an absolute foundation of all knowledge – on the basis of which he can start building up the edifice of knowledge

⁵² P. Ricoeur, 'Heidegger and the Question of the Subject', in P. Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, edited by Don Ihde, Continuum, London 2004, p. 221.

through *reason* and *logic* – and he therefore has no *memory*; in Heidegger, *memory* is a necessity for *thinking* whereas *forgetfulness* is the possibility of living through a mode of Being that does not question its own foundation: the *questioner* is a historical instance of *man*, that is *Dasein*, who has forgotten that very question that makes it what it is, the *question* of Being. In other words Heidegger starts *Sein und Zeit* by admitting the historical success of a certain mode of Being, that is the Cartesian “I”, which has provided the *ontological substratum* for modern science. Such an *ontological substratum* is based, nevertheless, on a purely *epistemological* act.

Heidegger underlines the fact that Descartes shakes Philosophy from its medieval *impasse*, where all that was left was not only subordinated to theology but also lost in extremely abstract and fruitless analyses of concepts. Again, he omits two whole centuries of Renaissance philosophy, with their different outcomes and lively debates, which range from Aristotelian to Neoplatonic positions, from the new philological tools of approaching the texts to the reflection on the new scientific and geographical discoveries. Ernesto Grassi is probably the scholar who has most clearly underlined Heidegger’s shortcoming in this sense. In his work *Heidegger and the Question of Renaissance Humanism* he quotes a key Heideggerian passage that seems to shed some light on the paradox of Heidegger’s omission:

Memory, the gathered thinking that recalls, is the source and the ground of poeticizing. Hence, the essence of poetry rests upon thinking....As long, of course, as we conceive of thinking according to what logic tells us about it, as long as we do not seriously take note that all logic is already fixed upon a particular kind of thinking, then we will not be able to recognize that, and to what extent, poeticizing rests upon thinking that recalls.⁵³

If Descartes provides a new foundation for philosophy, then faith in logical thinking, which also characterized medieval disputes, remains intact, indeed, it is provided with a more adequate *ground* upon which it can flourish, that is *subjective thinking*.

⁵³ From M. Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen, 1978), p. 131, in E. Grassi, *Heidegger and the Question of Renaissance Humanism: Four Studies*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, New York 1983, p. 75. Translation from German by E. Grassi.

Due to such indissoluble unity of *subject* and *logical thinking, method* actually becomes an end in itself to be pursued as it expresses the highest manifestation of the new identity of *rational man* as *ground*. The old *adaequatio intellectus ad rem* is resolved in an overwhelming victory for the human “I” at the expense not only of the human body but of *nature* itself, which becomes measurable and predictable according to the standards of the “I”: «As I doubt I must admit that “I am”. The “I”, accordingly, is indubitable. As the doubter, Descartes forced men into doubt in this way: he led them to think of themselves, of their “I”. Thus the “I”, human subjectivity, came to be declared the centre of thought»⁵⁴. The *poetic* and the *mnemonic* are relegated to a gregarious role not simply because they are functional to the new course of science but because they cannot be reduced to unitary thought as they are an expression of a *truth in transit*, which reveals by concealing: *memory* and its *images* are not a collection of facts but a production of *truth* through the concealing of what is forgotten and what is not shown, they are witnesses to the *irreducible*, they are the very practice of ἀλήθεια. This aspect, despite the Aristotelian and theological apparatus of intellectual and ecclesiastical power centres, is more than latent in medieval popular culture. People’s encounter with the *word* does not happen through logical reasoning but through metaphors, stories, imagery, although burdened by the Christian – and thus metaphysical – ballast. This aspect is recovered and refined throughout the Renaissance with the aim of recovering the ancient harmony with nature and not as a mere revival of *romanitas*. Says Grassi: «For the Humanists, metaphor has primacy over all rational, deductive learning and knowledge. A further insight is that languages – and along with them the gods and customs of people – arise, flourish and decay. Time results from the experience and the historicity of metaphors by which reality emerges from concealment»⁵⁵. As long as *memory, i.e. thinking*, guarantees the emergence of time, then life is not reducible to a measurable occurrence, and its truth lies in the event of *unconcealment*. Logical

⁵⁴ M. Heidegger, ‘Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics’, in M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p. 297.

⁵⁵ E. Grassi, *Heidegger and the Question of Renaissance Humanism*, p. 76.

thinking does not *think* itself, as it does not have *memory* of its own occurrence, thereby establishing itself as the standard for truth as *correspondence*, which, through the Galilean and Cartesian revolution, comes to coincide with *correctness*.

For the moment we are led not to share Cassirer's view that sees the Renaissance as a natural precursor of *modernity*; if we cannot speak of a Renaissance *thinking* as a whole, we deem some of its expressions as radically alien to the modern one. How Heidegger could not see this is still rather surprising. In the course of this work we shall attempt to show that the Renaissance is the lost opportunity of Western *thinking* and contains a radical alternative to that modernity that Heidegger so strongly thwarted. In Heidegger's history of metaphysics the Renaissance does not even find a proper place, as if it were a mere accident. That is the reason why this work is inspired by such an anomaly and by its effects. What really is at stake here is not an obtuse condemnation of *modernity* and repudiation of *science* but a different appreciation of it. Giordano Bruno's thought, one of the boldest products of the Renaissance, and Spinoza, who retains important Brunian elements beyond the Cartesian threshold, will be our Polar stars. Heidegger himself, inadvertently, suggests this experiment when, in his study of *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, he addresses Spinoza in a rather blunt and dismissive fashion:

But this system [Spinoza's system: *ed.*] only became possible on the foundation of a *peculiar one-sidedness* which will be discussed⁵⁶. In addition, it became possible because the metaphysical fundamental concepts of medieval scholasticism were simply built into the system with a rare lack of criticalness. The *mathesis universalis*, Descartes' doctrine of method, was taken over for the development of the system itself, and the true metaphysical fundamental idea comes from Giordano Bruno in every detail. This system of Spinoza, however, must above all be mentioned here *because* it played a role once again in the eighteenth century in discussions which are linked to the names Lessing, Jacobi, Mendelssohn, Herder and Goethe, discussions which will cast their last shadows into Schelling's treatise on freedom.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ In the course of his treatise, Heidegger actually never takes up the matter again.

⁵⁷ M. Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, translated by J. Stambaugh, The Ohio University Press Series in Continental Thought, Athens 1985, pp. 33-34.

We shall not treat either Spinoza or Bruno as mere influences on subsequent authors, we shall explore them in order to *recall* what was left unnoticed by Heidegger and what provides us with those secondary paths that have been negated by the rise of modernity. Only by activating *memory* and capturing what was *forgotten* or *reduced* at the rise of *modernity* we shall be able to come to terms with it without retreating into the Black Forest.

Chapter II – More Copernican than Copernicus

Section 1 – The Infinite and Mathematics

Our encounter with Heidegger has revealed that the ontological substratum of modernity is Descartes' *subject*, understood in its dichotomy with an *object*: from the body incarnating the *subject* to the earth around it and its individual beings, everything becomes subdued to the particular knowledge of modern science and is offered to the manipulation operated by *technology*. In other words: *Being* has delivered itself as *technology* through the development of modern science and that is what, historically, we call *modernity*. There seems to be, retrospectively, something yet unthought along the path traced by the Western metaphysical tradition that was captured by the Renaissance culture, which Heidegger seems to neglect. Before Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, considered as the manifesto of *modernity*, philosophy had produced a valuable and fruitful encounter with the new scientific discoveries. The Copernican Revolution represents a turning point in Western history but it was not a simple step forward on the way to modern science: surely Descartes' *subject* remains deeply Ptolemaic in its anthropocentrism, whether it accepts the new disposition of the universe or not, thus rendering the Copernican Revolution somehow incomplete.

Bruno rejects the theological and Aristotelian notions associated with medieval philosophy, with which he was well acquainted through the direct study of Aristotle and of Thomas Aquinas. His contact with Renaissance Neoplatonism through Marsilio Ficino will only be the first step of a systematic rejection of Aristotelianism⁵⁸. What really represented a turning point was the encounter with

⁵⁸ As Jill Kraye affirms: «Although Ficino received a traditional Aristotelian education at university, he was much at odds with the scholastic philosophers of his day as his humanist contemporaries: 'they are not lovers of wisdom (*philosophi*) but lovers of ostentatious display

Copernicus. Nevertheless, none of Bruno's encounters was ever characterized by a blind and total acceptance, as we can primarily infer from *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, the first of his "English" dialogues written in Italian:

He [Copernicus: *ed.*] was a man of deep, developed, diligent and mature genius: a man not second to any astronomer before him [...]. This estate he attained by freeing himself from a number of false presuppositions of the common and vulgar philosophy, which I will not go so far as to term blindness. Yet, Copernicus did not go much further [away from the common and vulgar philosophy] because, being more a student of mathematics than of nature, he could not plumb and probe into matters to the extent that he could completely uproot unsuitable and empty principles [...].⁵⁹

This passage is the point of departure for any serious account of Bruno's twofold – yet not ambiguous – view of Copernicus⁶⁰, which sheds light not only on Bruno's admiration for the new emerging science but also his wise caution when faced with merely mathematical models of nature. All the way through Bruno's philosophy,

(*philopompi*), who in their arrogance claim to have mastered Aristotle's thought, although they have only rarely and briefly listened to him – not even in Greek but stammering in a foreign tongue'. His own philosophical inclination was towards Plato rather than Aristotle, primarily because, as a priest, he considered Platonism to be more compatible with Christianity. It was Ficino who put Platonism on the philosophical map of the Renaissance, first and foremost by providing Latin versions of all the dialogues (first published in 1484), most of which were unknown to western European scholars, as well as translating a large amount of Neoplatonic literature from late antiquity, which provided the intellectual framework for his Christianized interpretation of Plato». From J. Kraye, "Philologists and philosophers", in J. Kraye (edited by), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, pp. 149, 150. The Ficino quotation is from M. Ficino, *Lettere*, ed. S. Gentile (Florence 1990–), I, p. 176.

⁵⁹ G. Bruno, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, p. 86. For the original version see G. Bruno, "La Cena de le Ceneri" in *Opere Italiane*, vol. I, critical edition by G. Aquilecchia, general coordination by N. Ordine, UTET, Turin 2007, pp. 448-449: «Lui avea un grave, elaborato, sollecito e maturo ingegno: uomo che non è inferiore a nessuno astronomo che sii stato avanti lui [...]: al che è divenuto per essersi liberato da alcuni presuppositi falsi de la comone e volgar filosofia, non voglio dir cecità. Ma però non se n'è molto allontanato: per che lui più studioso della matematica che della natura, non ha possuto profundar e penetrar sin tanto che potesse a fatto toglier via le radici de inconvenienti e vani principii [...].»

⁶⁰ About Bruno's opinion of Copernicus, Hilary Gatti rightly highlights an important point: «Bruno did not make the mistake of identifying Copernicus himself with the famous anonymous preface of the *De Revolutionibus*, actually written by Andreas Osiander which advised use of the astronomical system proposed in the volume only in terms of a mathematical hypothesis. Indeed Bruno was the first to declare publicly that Copernicus himself could not have written that preface, although he seems not to have known who the author was». From H. Gatti, "Bruno's Copernical Diagrams", in H. Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2011, p. 40.

mathematics as a mere tool is treated with suspicion and is considered insufficient when providing a serious account of the universe. Bruno rejects from the very beginning what was to become an axiom of modern science, *i.e.* the mathematical reading of nature later propelled by Galileo and supported by the Cartesian rational subject. Heidegger's reading of Galileo's free fall experiment from the leaning tower of Pisa, which we examined in the previous chapter, exemplified how a modern view does not stop at the mere evidence: although the experiment shows that two falling bodies with different weights do not fall exactly at the same time, Galileo argues that the same falling bodies, in the absence of any obstacles, would actually fall together. This is a manifestation of a mathematical projection over the scientific observation: «The mathematical is, as *mente concipere*, a project of thingness which, as it were, skips over the things»⁶¹. Bruno places himself in a rift between the rejection of the old Aristotelian way of experiencing nature and the projection of mathematics over the same observation, which he condemns. Luciana De Bernart clearly underlines this aspect: «[...] Bruno's [favourable: *ed.*] change of opinion regarding the "reasons" of the Copernican theory, is to be connected to his acquisition of the existence of "natural" mental structures of experience that are substantially different and disruptive if compared to the forms of Aristotelian attributive judgement. Within those Aristotelian forms the primitive mental processing of the sensible (*common sense*) was elaborated and on this, according to Bruno, was founded the misunderstanding of a natural science, conceived as an undue projection of the objective nature of things, *i.e.* the naively anthropomorphic dimension of *common language*»⁶². What we can infer from De Bernart's passage is that both the

⁶¹ M. Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics", in M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p. 291.

⁶² L. De Bernart, *Immaginazione e scienza in Giordano Bruno. L'infinito nelle forme dell'esperienza*, ETS Editrice, Pisa 1986, p. 130. My translation from Italian: «[...] il ripensamento di Bruno circa le 'ragioni' della teoria copernicana, sia da connettersi principalmente alla sua acquisizione dell'esistenza di 'naturali' strutture mentali dell'esperienza sostanzialmente 'diverse' e dirompenti rispetto alle forme del giudizio attributivo, a quelle forme, vale a dire, entro cui si definiva per Aristotele la primitiva elaborazione mentale del sensibile (*senso comune*), e su cui si era venuto fondando, secondo Bruno, il malinteso di una scienza naturale concepita come indebita

Aristotelian *common sense* and a purely mathematical reading of *nature* are illegitimate projections, although seemingly antithetical. The presupposition that nature could somehow be explained by a superimposition of anthropomorphic models is perfectly coherent with the Western history of thought, whether understood as Aristotelian *common sense* or as *mathematics*. Bruno captured in advance the fact that both attitudes were inscribed in the same thinking and in this he could virtually agree with Heidegger when he describes the transition from ὑποκείμενον to *subject*. Thus, if Bruno rejects the Aristotelian attitude towards nature, he could never accept its disguise and systematization in the shape of *mathematics*, however fruitful from a scientific point of view. The primacy of philosophy lies in going beyond such thinking; what Bruno is looking for is a qualitatively different relationship to the world and nature. His positioning within this rift leaves him alone between two different historical attitudes, not as a thinker of transition but as a thinker of a kind of alternative modernity that never saw the light of day. This aspect, which we shall inquire into now, makes of Bruno a unique interlocutor for attempting to answer the challenge Heidegger presents in *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*.

The relationship between mathematics, science and philosophy, in the context of Bruno's Copernicanism, is summed up in his notion of the *infinite*. If somehow Bruno is determined to go beyond Copernicus, it is precisely because Copernicus himself is not aware of the potential of his own discovery. In *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, while debating the Copernican theory, Bruno has his mouthpiece Theophilus respond to Nundinio's criticisms with the following words:

Nundinio then said that it cannot be possible that the earth moves, since it is the centre and mid-point of the universe, in which it is inherent to be the fixed and constant basis of all motion⁶³. The Nolan [Bruno, *ndr*] answered that one who believes that the sun is in the middle of the universe can say the same thing and that for this reason the sun is immobile and fixed, as Copernicus and many others, who had imposed a circumferential limitation to the universe, maintained. Consequently [Nundinio's] reason [for saying

proiezione nella natura oggettiva delle cose, della dimensione ingenuamente antropomorfica del *linguaggio comune*».

⁶³ See Aristotle, *De coelo*, II, 14, 296 B 21-26.

this] (if it is a reason) is useless against them and presupposes its own principles. It is also useless against the Nolan, who holds that the universe is infinite, whence it follows that nobody can simply be in the middle of the universe or at its periphery or anywhere between these two limits except through certain relations to other nearby bodies and artificially imposed limits.⁶⁴

In this dense passage we can see how Bruno, notwithstanding his admiration for Copernicus, still sees the Polish astronomer as excessively trapped within old Aristotelian conceptions of the universe, such as the need for celestial orbs and therefore a closed universe and the need for a centre. Bruno considers such notions as untenable, limiting and useless, as Gatti observes: «He centred his criticism on Copernicus' mathematical methodology and his lack of physical reasoning, because he thought that Copernicus was confusing mathematical concepts and physical realities. In this respect, Bruno felt that there had been little improvement on Ptolemy. The sky in which people lived at the end of the sixteenth century was still cluttered with eccentrics, epicycles, celestial orbs and proceSSIONAL anomalies which were clearly conceptual tools interfering, in Bruno's opinion, with a visualization of the real shape of the cosmos. Bruno wanted these concepts, which Copernicus had inherited from traditional cosmology, to be recognized as purely mental tools. They should be flexible where they had to be used, and where possible be eliminated altogether. It would, of course, be Kepler, with the discovery of the elliptical orbit of Mars, who would initiate the breakthrough in this context; but by that time Bruno was dead»⁶⁵. Bruno confirms his hostility towards imposing mental schemes over the nature of the universe and, instead of enclosing the universe in a comfortably self-

⁶⁴ G. Bruno, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, pp. 151-152. For the original version see G. Bruno, "La Cena de le Ceneri" in G. Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, vol. I, p. 507: «Disse appresso Nundinio che non può essere verosimile che la terra si muove, essendo quella il mezzo e il centro de l'universo, al quale tocca essere fisso e costante fundamento d'ogni moto. Rispose il Nolano, che questo medesimo può dir colui che tiene il sole nel mezzo de l'universo, e per tanto immobile e fisso, come intese il Copernico et altri molti che hanno donato termine circonferenziale a l'universo: di sorte che questa sua raggione (se pur è raggione) è nulla contra quelli, e suppone i propri principii. È nulla anco contra il Nolano il quale vuole il mondo essere infinito, e però non esser corpo alcuno in quello al quale semplicemente convegnà essere nel mezzo, o nell'estremo, o tra que' dua termini: ma per certe relazioni ad altri corpi e termini intenzionalmente appresi».

⁶⁵ H. Gatti, *Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science* [1999], Cornell University Press, New York 2002, p. 83.

contained and measurable perspective; he prefers to direct his attention to the *infinite*. It is the very idea of the *infinite* that gives strength to the omni-relational view of the bodies within the universe that, inspired by Nicholas of Cusa⁶⁶, leads to Bruno's own mathematics. As De Bernart affirms: «The very term “infinite”, after all, does not indicate in this context an *attribute*, nor is it thus conceived: its assimilation to the concept of *sustanza* [substance: *ed.*] tells us that we are now facing a concept of infinite that is emancipated from any link with a limit attributive dimension, such as it was the one signified by the classical concept of *apeiron* and [...] by the theological-medieval concept of infinite as absolute. The meaning of the Brunian concept of infinite consists in the relational ratio of a factuality that is intelligible only as the “ordered” momentum of a mentally inexhaustible geometry of the possible. Such a geometry is immanent with respect to the atomistic-combinatory structure of each aspect of experience and constantly moves the always *apparent* finiteness, so that the actual deciphering key of reality is reflected in the subject's mind, especially prepared for the task by nature itself»⁶⁷. Here De Bernart synthesizes well the

⁶⁶ There is not enough space here to provide a study of Nicholas of Cusa's influence upon Bruno, yet from the summary Detlef Thiel provides of Cusa's significance in the history of philosophy, we can find condensed many elements which have emerged or will emerge in our study of Bruno, for Cusa «is an instructive example of how one can hold out under tensions, whether societal, economic, spiritual, theological, philosophical, or scientific. His defence of a transparent order converges with an infinitism that remains optimistic despite all the sobering insight into human limitations and which inspires creativity – not as a trivial game, but as a reaction to the distress of the age.

Second, he is a paradigm of a universal semiotics in the light of infinity and immortality. If all knowledge is necessarily transmitted via signs, mirrors, and parables, and can be gained only by “symbolic investigation”, this entails a disenchantment (with a nominalistic colouring) of false claims to power. Since the human person can never attain the *vocabulum praecisum* (the real term) – for that would be the object itself – all that remains is the reference (phonic, graphic, or of some other kind) of the signs to their origin, the human spirit. And this spirit should become an image of the absolute». From D. Thiel, “Nicholas of Cusa (1401 – 1464). Squaring the Circle: Politics, Piety, Rationality”, in P. R. Blum (edited by), *Philosophers of the Renaissance*, translated by B. McNeil, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 2010, p. 56.

⁶⁷ L. De Bernart, *Immaginazione e scienza in Giordano Bruno*, p. 135. My translation from Italian: «Lo stesso termine ‘infinito’, del resto, non designa più propriamente in questo contesto un *attributo*, né come tale è concepito: la sua equiparazione al concetto di *sustanza* ci dice che siamo di fronte a un concetto di infinito ormai emancipato da qualsiasi ancoraggio ad una dimensione attributiva limite, qual'era quella significata dal concetto classico di *apeiron* e [...] dal concetto teologico-medievale di infinito come assoluto. Il significato del concetto bruniano di infinito si

Brunian approach both from an ontological and a gnosiological point of view and the way they reflect the cosmological one: if the appearance of finitude «deceives us on the surface of this globe [the Earth: *ed.*], then we should be much more suspicious about the limit that seems to comprise the starry concavity»⁶⁸ says Bruno, who does away with Aristotelian spheres, deeming them illusory and useless. Here Bruno seems to transform his Platonism in order to use it against Aristotle: in our naïve realism we are indeed victims of illusions that stand between truth and us. Nevertheless, it is not because sensible reality is somehow untrue or illusory but simply because we are not able to dwell in it according to its infinite perspective. If we are entrapped in our geocentric and anthropocentric understanding, it is because we keep on projecting our finite standards upon the *infinite*. While chanting about stars and planets Bruno tells us something very important about ourselves; on a path that, in our opinion, recalls the way out of the Platonic cave, we envisage an even more ambitious road, which invites us to rise up to the infinite universe:

So we are led to discover the infinite effect of the infinite cause, the true and living sign of infinite vigour; and we have the knowledge not to search for divinity removed from us as if we have it near; it is within us more than we ourselves are. In the same way, the inhabitants of other worlds must not search for divinity in our world, for they have it close to and within themselves, since the moon is no more heaven for us than we are for the moon.⁶⁹

profila piuttosto consistere nella ragione relazionale di una fattualità leggibile solo come momento 'ordinato' di una mentalmente inesauribile geometria del possibile la quale, immanente nella struttura atomico-combinatoria di ogni aspetto dell'esperienza, ne mobilita costantemente la finitezza solo *apparente*, sì che da questa traspaia e si riverberi nella mente del soggetto, a ciò opportunamente attrezzata dalla natura stessa, l'effettiva chiave di intellegibilità del reale».

⁶⁸ G. Bruno, "De l'infinito universo e mondi", in G. Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, vol. II, p. 35. My translation from Italian: «Or come abbiamo per esperienza che ne inganna nella superficie di questo globo in cui ne ritroviamo, molto maggiormente doviamo averlo suspecto quanto a quel termine che nella stellifera concavità ne fa comprendere».

⁶⁹ G. Bruno, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, p. 91. For the original version see G. Bruno, "La Cena de le Ceneri", from G. Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, vol. I, pp. 455-456: «Cossì siamo promossi a scuoprire l'infinito effetto dell'infinita causa, il vero e vivo vestigio dell'infinito vigore. Et abbiamo dottrina di non cercar la divinità rimossa da noi: se l'abbiamo appresso, anzi di dentro più che noi medesmi siamo dentro a noi. Non meno che gli coltori degli altri mondi non la denno cercare appresso di noi, l'avendo appresso e dentro di sé. Atteso che non più la luna è cielo a noi, che noi alla luna».

In this beautiful passage from *The Ash Wednesday Supper* Bruno shows how absurd it is to consider ourselves *other* in relation to the rest of the universe or assuming that looking away from ourselves will tell us something more. Only understanding ourselves from the point of view of the infinite can we really feel a part of the universe, thus being one with divinity and not place it somewhere above artificial heavens of fixed stars. It is only by giving up on our finite projection upon the universe that we become one with it and not its centre – or its periphery – for there are no centres and no peripheries in the infinite universe. Bruno did not need the Apollo 11 to understand this. As a matter of fact, even here on the Earth itself, Bruno was uncomfortable with Columbus' discovery and the subsequent subduing of American natives⁷⁰. He not only found it morally deplorable but he identified it as a sign of the *hybris* and limited perspective of European culture. Its absolute religious fervour and intolerance were clear signs of the unawareness and ignorance of the

⁷⁰ As Bruno says in the *Spaccio*, referring to Columbus: «It is that one who crossed the seas in order to violate those laws of Nature by intermingling those peoples whom the benign mother set apart, and in order to propagate vice from one generation to another». G. Bruno, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, p. 202. The defence of the American Indians does not spring from a humanitarian enthusiasm but from a solid ontological reason: *man* does not originate from the will of a Creator but is the result of the infinite vicissitude of the world, which is not limited to our planet but to the infinite universe. As Diego Pirillo puts it: «Life is born out of spontaneous generation in every place and in every time, following the incessant movement of the atoms. It is nonsense, then, to think that in the infinite universe other civilizations and forms of life cannot be found. [...] It was the Lucretian image of man, subject to the same natural conditions of any other living being, to influence in a decisive way the Brunian thought on civilization processes. [...] Although the *Spaccio*, referring to the American savages, recognizes that “these ones of the new world [...] in many circumstances show themselves to be wiser, and not even ignorant when dealing with them”, Bruno does not have any inclination towards the myth of the ‘good savage’ and he never represents the life conditions of the Indians as a primitive state of originary innocence and purity». D. Pirillo, *Filosofia ed eresia nell’Inghilterra del tardo Cinquecento. Bruno, Sidney e i dissidenti religiosi italiani*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 2010, pp. 152-153. My translation from Italian: «La vita nasce per generazione spontanea in ogni luogo e in ogni tempo seguendo il movimento incessante degli atomi. È dunque insensato pensare che nell’universo infinito non ci siano altre civiltà e altre forme di vita. [...] Fu l’immagine lucreziana dell’uomo, soggette alle stesse condizioni naturali di ogni altro essere vivente, a influenzare in modo decisivo le riflessioni bruniane sui processi di civilizzazione. [...] Sebbene lo *Spaccio*, alludendo ai selvaggi americani, riconosca che “questi de la terra nova [...] in molte circostanze si mostrano più savii, et in trattar gli lor dei manco ignoranti”, Bruno non ha però alcuna simpatia per il mito del ‘buon selvaggio’ e non presenta mai le condizioni di vita degli Indians come uno stato primitivo di originaria innocenza e purezza».

infinite and a subsequent inability to conceive any kind of *difference*. Bruno's philosophy opens up to *difference* in a way that ideally precedes Husserl's reflection as we read it in the *Crisis*.

It is not only a morally relativistic attitude, it is also a clear ontological stance in favour of a newly found intimacy between humans and the universe, *man* and *nature*, based on a new understanding of both. An *infinite* conceived as a mere succession of finite objects is absurd as it cannot account for *vicissitude*, movement, life and death. It would be a sterile and fixed totality of objects that may make sense from an arithmetical point of view but definitely not from an ontological or even a physical one. In the *De coelo*, Aristotle tries to show that an infinite body cannot exist through a *reductio ad absurdum*⁷¹. If a body is infinite, says Aristotle, then it must be made of either finite or infinite parts; if they are infinite they can only be of a finite number of kinds, as the elements such as fire, earth, water and air are finite. Therefore, for the body to be infinite, kinds, which are finite in number, must be infinite in extent. Nevertheless kinds are also finite in themselves, as there can be no infinite type of motion or infinite weight or lightness. A body, thereby, cannot have infinite parts; therefore it cannot be infinite. Bruno completely dismisses Aristotle's demonstration by claiming that Aristotle is arbitrarily applying finite notions to the *infinite*: the very notion of "part" cannot be applied to the infinite because it would have to be part of a totality but no totality can ever be reached by an infinite addition of parts. In *De l'infinito, universo e mondi* Bruno tries to imagine how two infinite bodies could come into contact:

Let us pretend that two infinite bodies, A and B, are conjoined by the line or surface FG: of course, they will not be acting on each other according to their whole being because they are not in contact with all of their parts, for the part they have in common must be to some extent finite. Furthermore, even if we suppose surfaces or lines to be infinite, it will not follow that those two united bodies will provoke an infinite action or passion because they are not intensive but extended, just as all parts are extended. It

⁷¹ See Aristotele, *De coelo*, i, 7.

follows that in no part does the infinite act according to its full being, but extensively from part to part, separately.⁷²

Aristotle would like to claim that the *infinite* is absurd by imagining it as composed of parts *i.e.* by attributing to the *infinite* something peculiar of finite things, which is acting or being affected, thus changing; this gives rise to the paradoxes that should supposedly rule out the infinite. But Aristotle's premise is absurd in virtue of the fact that in nature *change* cannot be applied to a continuous infinite body, as Sydney Greenberg underlines: «For Bruno there is never any such action and passion as Aristotle indicates; whether we view the case of the finite action between bodies, or an action between finites and infinities or between two infinities, the agent never exerts its total vigour and power on the effect. Action and passion are effective according to dimension and distance, and the agent and patient are never so close that all their parts are continuous; consequently, the action will never be infinite, because the parts are not “intensive” but “extensive”»⁷³. This attack affects the whole structure of the Aristotelian finite world and unmasks its assumptions that movement and change are teleological and that they all refer to the *centre* of the universe – the Earth – all of which stops making sense in an infinite universe. As we said earlier, in the *De coelo* i. 7, Aristotle denies the possibility for an infinite universe to exist on the basis that it should be composed of parts that must be either of infinite kinds, which is not possible as kinds are finite, or themselves infinite, which is not possible as there are no such things as infinite weights or movements – each natural thing should act

⁷² G. Bruno, “De l’infinito, universo e mondi”, in G. Bruno, *Opere italiane* vol. 2, critical edition by G. Aquilecchia, general coordination by N. Ordine, UTET, Turin 2007, p. 81. My translation from Italian: «Perché poniamo il caso che sieno doi infiniti corpi A e B, gli quali son continuati o congiunti insieme nella linea o superficie FG: certo non verranno ad oprar l’uno contra l’altro secondo tutta la virtù; perché non sono propinqui l’uno a l’altro secondo tutte le parti: essendo che la continuazione non possa essere se non in qualche termine finito. E dico di vantaggio che benché supponiamo quella superficie o linea essere infinita, non seguitarà per questo che gli corpi continuati in quella caggionino azione e passione infinita; perché non sono intense, ma estense, come le parti sono estense: onde avviene che in nessuna parte l’infinito opera secondo tutta la sua virtù, ma estensivamente secondo parte e parte, discreta e separatamente».

⁷³ S. Greenberg, *The Infinite in Giordano Bruno*, King’s Crown Press, Columbia University, New York 1950, p. 55.

towards an end and that would not be the case, were the thing infinite. What is clear now is that the *infinite* is not an arithmetical addition of finite bodies, even though reason itself tempts us to think so as reasonable *common sense* suggests that in order to get to a totality we should sum up all the innumerable finite things that populate the universe; such an attitude is, according to Bruno, nothing more than a mathematical abstraction and that is why, in order to deepen our understanding of Bruno's infinite, we need to get a better idea of his *mathematics*.

The infinity of the universe does not only show that, from a cosmological point of view, Bruno is truly more Copernican than Copernicus and that Copernicus actually lacks a philosophical perspective but it also forces Bruno to consider, as well as the infinitely large, the infinitely small. If *mathematics* is the ground on which Bruno operates, it will be a sort of mathematics that is very far from the Copernican or the yet-to-come Galilean one. As a matter of fact, even though the concept of infinity pervades the whole body of the Nolan's philosophy, we shall try for now to understand its mathematical nature in order to further highlight the striking difference between Bruno and his modern successors. This will not only stress the *ante litteram* similarity with the Heideggerian view on the relationship between modernity and mathematics, it will also be a step forward towards the rejection of a science that is founded on abstraction and the need to question our anthropocentrism. Bruno's dispute and controversial friendship with a man whom he considered as a clumsy and ignorant mathematician, Fabrizio Mordente⁷⁴ from Salerno, inventor of a new

⁷⁴ Bruno met Mordente during the winter of 1586 in Paris, where the latter was presenting his most famous invention and the former was literally struck by the new proportional compass, so much that he elevated Mordente to the rank of «god of geometricians». It is rather odd to see a cultured and refined philosopher, famous throughout Europe, being so enthusiastic about a merely mechanical invention. As a matter of fact, Bruno was not so much interested in the mechanical aspects of the geometrical tool as in the implications of such an invention, so much so that he offered to translate Mordente's exposition into Latin in order to give it international resonance. Bruno's so-called translation ended up in the writing of two dialogues that went far beyond Mordente's intentions, to the point that the latter believed, in his lack of philosophical and linguistic understanding, Bruno actually tried to steal his invention. See G. del Giudice, "Introduzione", in G. Bruno, *Il Dio dei geometri. Quattro Dialoghi*, introduction and translation by G. Del Giudice, Di Renzo Editore, Roma 2009.

proportional compass, shows Bruno's approach towards *mathematics* in relation to the *infinite*. Bruno does not appear interested in the mere mechanical potential of the new invention which, through a system of perpendicular arms, allows for the drawing of more precise circumferences; what Bruno focuses on is the method of partition of straight lines and curves. De Bernart, commenting one of the four dialogues devoted to Mordente's invention – the *Idiota Triumphans*⁷⁵ – underlines a particular passage⁷⁶ where Bruno addresses several minor criticisms to Mordente. Bruno contests the inappropriate use of the term “infinite” and he blames it on Mordente's ignorance and inability to use language properly. Says De Bernart: «The first of these criticisms is the one concerning “the infinity of number”. Even though Bruno risks appearing pedantic, this criticism actually provides the philosopher with the occasion to express a primary aspect of the mathematical problem at stake: “When [Mordente] speaks of an ‘almost infinite number of mechanical effects’, we need to forgive him – says Philoteus – for the use of the unusual locution ‘*in a kind of infinite way*’. What he really means, speaking under the effect of an ecstatic impetus, is not different from what is commonly denoted by the saying ‘somehow infinite’ [*quodammodo infinitus*]: in his utter simplicity he ignores that a magnitude, whatever its extension may be, is equally distant from the infinite as much as any finite number, *whatever and however many all the other finite numbers within the latter may be*. Therefore it is inappropriate for a geometrician as well as for an arithmetician to affirm that something is ‘almost infinite’»⁷⁷. This passage sheds light on a few very important

⁷⁵ The “idiot” indicating Mordente and all those who believe knowledge to be confined to merely mechanical activity.

⁷⁶ See G. Bruno, “Idiota Triumphans”, in G. Bruno, *Due dialoghi sconosciuti e due dialoghi noti*, edited by G. Aquilecchia, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 1957, p. 12.

⁷⁷ L. De Bernart, *Numerus quodammodo infinitus. Per un approccio storico-teorico al «dilemma matematico» nella filosofia di Giordano Bruno*, Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 2002, p. 201. My translation from Italian. «Il primo di questi rilievi è quello che riguarda ‘l’infinità del numero’: nello scrupolo quasi pedantesco che sembra informarlo, questo rilievo fornisce in realtà al filosofo l’occasione al filosofo di esprimersi su un aspetto tutt’altro che secondario della problematica matematica in gioco: “Quando [Mordente] parla di ‘un numero quasi infinito di effetti meccanici’, bisogna perdonargli – rileva Philoteus – la dizione inconsueta ‘*in un certo modo infinito*’, giacché quanto egli intende esprimere, parlando sotto l’azione dell’impeto estatico, non è diverso da ciò che comunemente si denota con la dizione ‘in

issues, one of which is akin to the problem of the partition of the *infinite*. Attacking Aristotle, Bruno argues in the *De l'infinito*⁷⁸ that in order to divide the infinite into parts one should attribute a measurement or a number to it. Nonetheless this ends up making no sense because any sort of measurement, being it *duration* or *distance*, is not commensurable with the infinite. Any *extensive* notion cannot be attributed to the *infinite* as a whole, which is understood *intensively*:

for in it [the infinite: *ed.*] the maximum time, meaning the greatest proportional part of duration, ends up being equal to the *minimum* [my italics: *ed.*], granted that infinite centuries are not more than the infinite hours [...].⁷⁹

certo modo infinito': nella sua semplicità egli ignora che una grandezza, qualunque sia la sua estensione, è parimenti distante dall'infinito di quanto lo è un numero finito, *quali e quanti che siano tutti gli altri numeri finiti compresi entro quest'ultimo*, e pertanto è fuori luogo per un geometra come per un aritmetico affermare che qualcosa è 'quasi infinito'. The passage quoted by De Bernart is taken from G. Bruno, *Due dialoghi sconosciuti e due dialoghi noti*, edited by G. Aquilecchia, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 1957, p. 12.

⁷⁸ «First, then, he [Aristotle: *ed.*] proceeds by unnatural foundations, wishing to take this or that part of the infinite; since the infinite cannot have parts, if we do not wish to say such parts must be infinite: since it implies a contradiction to say that in the infinite there is a greater and a smaller part and a part that is more or less proportional to it; since you do not come closer to the infinite by the hundred than by the ternary: as the infinite number is made of no less infinite ternaries than infinite hundreds. The infinite size is no less of infinite feet than of infinite miles: but when we wish to mention the parts of the infinite distance we do not say one hundred miles, a thousand parasangs; as these have to be called parts of the finite, and they truly are parts of the finite to which they have proportion [...]. Thus a thousand years are not part of eternity as they are not proportionate to the whole: but they are part of some kind of time measurement, as of ten thousand years, a hundred thousand centuries». From G. Bruno, "De l'Infinito, Universo e Mondi", in G. Bruno, *Opere italiane* vol. 2, p. 79. My translation from Italian: «Prima dunque nel suo supporre procede per non naturali fondamenti, volendo prendere questa e quella parte de l'infinito; essendo che l'infinito non può aver parte, se non vogliamo dir pure che quella parte è infinita: essendo che implica contraddizione che ne l'infinito sia parte maggiore e parte minore e parte che abbia maggiore e minore proporzione a quello; essendo che all'infinito non più ti avvicini per il centinaio che per il ternario: perché non meno de infiniti ternarii che de infiniti centenarii consta l'infinito. La dimensione infinita non è meno de infiniti piedi che de infinite miglia: però quando vogliamo dir le parti dell'infinita dimensione, non diciamo cento miglia, mille parasanghe; perché queste nientemanco possono esser dette parti del finito, e veramente son parti del finito solamente al cui tutto hanno proporzione [...]. Cossì mille anni non son parte dell'eternità, perché non hanno proporzione al tutto: ma sì bene son parti di qualche misura di tempo, come di diece mille anni, di cento mila secoli».

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 80. My translation from Italian: «[...] perché in quello il tempo massimo, cioè la grandissima parte proporzionale della durazione, viene ad essere equivalente alla minima, atteso che non son più gli infiniti secoli che le infinite ore [...].».

From the perspective of the *infinite*, then, the opposites coincide – minimum and maximum, hot and cold, the instant and eternity – as any form of the absolute, including the centrality of the Earth, is missing. That is why Bruno’s need to be coherent with his theory of the *infinite* clashes with the Aristotelian theory that bodies can be infinitely divided and that the *minimum* is only conceivable in relation to form⁸⁰. For instance, an apple remains such only down to a certain amount of splitting, a man remains such only to the point at which there is a sufficient quantity of matter in order to retain his form. Aristotle’s thought thus gives absolute preponderance to *form* in his ontology of beings and, at the same time, projects the same abstraction and confusion he held in relation to the *infinite* upon the infinitely small by forcing onto matter the possibility of being divided to infinity, thus denying the existence of an actual *minimum*. Mordente’s invention, which was supposed to measure all the way down to the infinite fractions of matter, provides Bruno with the idea of refuting Aristotle’s theory. Mordente’s method of mechanical partition of a line suggests, again, that it makes no sense to *divide* a quantity to infinity. The method suggested by Mordente’s compass mechanically superimposes over a segment B a certain arbitrary fraction of segment A ($1/n$ A), thus determining how many times that fraction is contained in B. If the quantities are incommensurable, there must be a fraction of $B < 1/n$ A that remains. Now, if we were to proceed according to what mathematicians do, thereby in agreement with Aristotle, we would first of all suppose that such a procedure is a *division* and, second, that it gives rise to an irrational number, which is *infinite*. Yet Mordente’s method proposes to keep on superimposing the remaining fraction on another fraction that corresponds to $1/n^2$ A, then subsequently $1/n^3$ A and so on. From here Bruno figures out that what is happening is not an actual division to infinity but a process that involves relating determinate and *finite* quantities ($1/n$ A, $1/n^2$ A, etc. with B’s fractions) to one another, which are thereby not measured but *numerated*. The *minimum*, then, ends up being not *an absolute smallest possible quantity* – of which it would not make sense

⁸⁰ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics V*.

to speak as it would have to be the *smallest* relatively to some other quantity – but a relational principle that is the basis for the *composition* of any being in the infinite universe. Bruno operates a shift in meaning by intuiting that things cannot be explained by being mathematically *calculated* in an abstract fashion. Mathematical *calculation* is an abstraction of things because it does not provide an actual experience for things understood *extensively*. Only by being mathematically *related* do the *minima* give *form*⁸¹ to things. Thus the *actor*, or “numerating agent”, by *numerating* and *ordering* reality, experiences it in its extensive and finite dimension. As De Bernart puts it: «Number and quantity originate, for Bruno, as mental tools of ordering a reality that without order cannot even be perceived; as such, number and quantity, in their schematic and simple nature, are not inherent to natural objectivity, but to the perceptive *intentionality*, to the properly human way of experiencing the external world»⁸². We can conclude that Bruno practises a *philosophical mathematics* that proceeds in the opposite direction to the abstract rigour that will characterize the Galilean and Cartesian approach. What emerges from Bruno’s notion of *infinity* is that *mathematics* cannot be applied to reality *a priori*: the task of philosophy is to make sure that such a precious and sophisticated tool as mathematics is not merely *projected* upon reality but it is faithful to it, in order to give us a world that is neither an abstract projection of a rational *subject* nor understood by the categories of common sense. Bruno is a great example in the history of thought of a philosopher who was able to engage with science whilst never abandoning, indeed, affirming his philosophical standpoint. In this respect, Heidegger’s account of the history of metaphysics does not seem to hold, as in Bruno’s case it is the point of view of *modernity* which gets “skipped over” and not *beings*. Bruno envisages a role for the

⁸¹ As a matter of fact, *form* is no longer the ontological basis of beings but it actually depends on composition.

⁸² L. De Bernart, *Numerus quodammodo infinitus. Per un approccio storico-teorico al «dilemma matematico» nella filosofia di Giordano Bruno*, p. 225. My translation from Italian: «Il numero e la grandezza nascono, per Bruno, come strumenti mentali di ordinamento di una realtà che senza ordine non può neanche essere percepita; in quanto tali, il numero e la grandezza non sono inerenti, nella semplicità e schematicità che li caratterizza, all’oggettività naturale, bensì all’*intenzione* percettiva, alla modalità propriamente umana di fare esperienza del mondo».

philosopher, thus for *thinking*, that can relate to scientific practice not as a threat to himself but as a possibility for opening up new horizons.

Section 2 - The Soul of Inanimate Things

Bruno's rejection of infinity when dealing with the *small* side of things may seem surprising and may also give the impression of an excessive antagonism to Aristotle. There is, nonetheless, an intrinsic necessity for Bruno to hold this position, which is not the merely mathematical necessity that we saw in the last section; rather, it is the very possibility for *man* to dwell in an intelligible world. As Sandro Mancini puts it: «If, as a matter of fact, knowing is measuring, as Bruno assumes from Nicholas of Cusa, the infinite as such does not amount to a principle of intelligibility but of indifference, uniformity; so that, having welcomed the infinite from the side of composition, Bruno is forced to put a limit on the opposite side and to look for a criterion of measurement in a definite minimum»⁸³. By *measuring* Bruno does not imply the correctness dictated by an objective standard but a condition for man to experience the world extensively; such an experience takes the form of ordering, measuring and composition, which allow for the infinite variety and the endless vicissitude of the world. Were a division to infinity possible, it would not make sense to speak of ordering and composition, as any attempt in that direction would be lost within the indifference of the *infinite*, as Bruno showed through the examples of distance and time. There is another reason for it, which is even more fundamental: Bruno's intuition – unwittingly suggested by Mordente's invention – that the *minimum* is not the result of a mechanical or arithmetic *division*, but the *assumption* needed to carry out a mathematical *numeration* and therefore a physical *composition*.

⁸³ S. Mancini, *La sfera infinita. Identità e differenza nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno*, Mimesis, Milano, 2000, p. 198. My translation from Italian: «Se, infatti, conoscere è misurare, come Bruno assume da Cusano, l'infinito di per sé non costituisce un principio di intellegibilità, ma di indifferenza, di uniformità; onde accolto operativamente l'infinito dal lato della composizione, Bruno è costretto a porre un limite nel lato opposto, e a cercare il criterio di misura in un minimo definito».

In this instance De Bernart clarifies why we speak of its *omni-relational* nature: «Thus the *minimum* is an assumption, it is always and in any way what is presupposed as the ultimate component of a “whole” that one intends to analyze in its internal relations and without which those very relations are not construable or determinable»⁸⁴. The *minimum*, then, makes sense only in relation to a *whole* which is its way of relating to other *minima*, whether the *whole* is a word, whose *minimum* is constituted by its letters, a galaxy in relation to its planets, a stone in relation to its crystals or the World Wide Web in relation to its websites: Bruno ensures that, at every level, nature becomes intelligible through the notion of *minimum*. That is why he cannot identify the *minimum* with the Democritean/Lucretian atom, whose main feature was to be the smallest part characterized by the absence of void, *i.e.* impenetrability. He even makes one further distinction according to different spheres of reality where the metaphysical *minimum* is identified with the *monad*, the physical one with the *atom* and the geometrical one with the *point*:

Number is an accident of the monad, the monad is the essence of number; composition requires the atom and the atom is the essence of the compound. The principle of number is the monad with the number, as the principle of magnitude is the atom with the magnitude itself: in a subordinate or primary manner they belong to the genus of quantity; in it all things are reduced to unity as, truly, all numerically diversified atoms are reduced to the foundation of the atom, according to the species. For those who look at bodies, the substance of all things is the minimum body, *i.e.* the atom. For those who look at the straight line or the plain, the minimum is the point.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ L. De Bernart, *Numerus quodammodo infinitus. Per un approccio storico-teorico al «dilemma matematico» nella filosofia di Giordano Bruno*, p. 234. My translation from Italian: «Dunque il *minimo* è un’assunzione, è sempre e comunque ciò che si presuppone come componente ultima di un ‘intero’ che ci si prefigge di analizzare nelle sue relazioni interne e senza di cui le relazioni stesse non sono costruibili e determinabili».

⁸⁵ G. Bruno, “De triplici minimo et mensura”, in G. Bruno, *Opera latine conscripta*, edited by F. Tocco and H. Vitelli, vol. I.3, Florence 1889, p. 140. My translation from Latin and rendition in prose, also based on the Italian translation by Carlo Monti in G. Bruno, *Opere latine*, edited by C. Monti, Mondadori, Milano 2008, p. 98:

«Numerus est accidens monadis, et monas est essentia numeri; sic compositio accidit atomo, et atomus est essentia compositi. Principium numeri monas cum numero, sicut et principium magnitudinis atomus cum ipsa magnitudine, reductive vel principaliter sunt in genere quantitatis, et accidentia substantiae, quae est monas antecedens, vere et per se minimum principium magni-

The *minimum*, then, seems to become the essential *substratum* of reality: it has no size or duration but it is *extensively* expressed as *relation*; it is not an *object* then, therefore it retreats from a merely extensive perception. The *minimum* is what guarantees that, as letters compose a word, as bricks compose a building and atoms compose a molecule, *beings* are only understood in terms of their compositional relations and not as isolated *objects*. Not possessing determinations such as size and duration, the *minimum* coincides with the infinitely large and it is *intensively* present in each *being*, although it does not reveal itself. What is *intensive* hides and retreats from mere perception and yet, through its retreat, it offers *beings* as we know them in their *extensive* determinations. The twofold understanding of the *minimum* appears to reproduce the movement of Heidegger's notion of ἀλήθεια in its game of *unconcealment* through the safekeeping of *Being*. This similar dynamics shows that whenever the *subject/object* dichotomy is not present, the multiplicity of *beings*, of which we are part, can only be sustained by what is taken away from what is determinable through measurement and calculation. *Man*, although fully involved in the multiplicity of *beings*, is the place where the two thoughts of what is determined and what is concealed can be held at once. Furthermore, the notion of *minimum* does not project a mathematical model upon *nature* but lets *nature* operate in its infinite variety. It comes as no surprise, then, if in one of the Latin poems he wrote during his sojourn in Frankfurt, the *De triplici minimo et mensura*, Bruno even refers to the *minimum* as *substance*:

The Minimum is the substance of things: you will see nevertheless that it is still greater than any other thing. The monad, the atom and all the spirit that pervades everything derive from the minimum, which has no dimensions and constitutes everything with its

tudinis, in quo non ex quo; et in hac omnia sunt unum, sicut in veritate atomi secundum speciem omnes atomi secundum numerum. Ad corpora ergo respicienti omnium substantia minimum corpus est seu atomus, ad lineam vero atque planum minimum quod est punctus».

mark, total essence and, if you look well, everything is made of it, even matter itself.
[...]

If the monad did not exist, there would not be any numbers either; as a matter of fact, it ordered the species, constituting every kind. [...] It is said that it is the constant element in all things and the principle that determines the finite above them and pervades the infinite space constituting, tying, integrating, propagating, eternal, everything that is composite and whatever is created simple; because the maximum derives from the minimum, is in the minimum, tends to and through the minimum.⁸⁶

The *minimum* is here characterized as *substance* in a way that cannot prescind from the *infinite*. It will now be obvious that it cannot be considered as a *part* of the *infinite* but that it actually coincides with it: as there is no difference between an instant and eternity from the point of view of the *infinite*, then the *minimum* and the *infinite* are substantially coincident⁸⁷. This apparent paradox makes sense only when it is

⁸⁶ G. Bruno, “De triplici minimo et mensura”, in G. Bruno, *Opera latine conscripta*, I.3, edited by F. Tocco and H. Vitelli, Florence 1889, pp. 138-139. My rendition in prose and translation from Latin, also based on the Italian translation by Carlo Monti, in G. Bruno, *Opere latine*, edited by C. Monti, Mondadori, Milano 2008, pp. 95-96:

«[...] MINIMUM substantia rerum est;
Atque id idem tandem operies super omnia magnum.
Hinc monas, hinc atomus, totusque hinc undique fusus
Spiritus, in nulla consistens mole, suisque
Omnia constituens signis, essentia tota,
Si res inspicias, hoc tandem est, materisque.

[...]

Esto nulla monas, numerorum non erit ullus;
Namque ea constituit species, statuens genus omne.

[...]

Ergo cluit constans in cunctis, et super haec qui
Claudit finitum, infinitum permeat amplum,
Efficiens, nectens, integrans atque propagans
Quidquid compostum, et simplex quodcumque creatur
Immenso a seculo pendens; quia maxima quaeque
Ex minimo, in minimo, ad minimum sunt, per minimumque.»

⁸⁷ In an interesting and short work, Guido del Giudice blends Eastern wisdom with Bruno’s philosophy of the contraries: «[...] for Bruno the minimum heat and the minimum cold were coincident, as in the maximum heat he singles out the principle for the movement towards the cold, in the same way as “*in the last part of the decayed is the principle of the generated*”, for one is the principle of decay and of generation. “*The way up and the way down are one and the same*”, continues Heraclitus, affirming, like the Taoists, the fundamental union of every couple of opposites and the consequent relativity of all concepts». From G. del Giudice, *La coincidenza degli opposti. Giordano Bruno tra Oriente e Occidente*, Di Renzo Editore, Roma 2005, p. 48. My translation from Italian: «[...] per Bruno il minimo caldo e il minimo freddo sono tutt’uno, in quanto nel massimo calore egli individua il principio del moto verso il freddo, così come “*nell’ultimo del corrotto è il principio del generato*”, perché uno è il principio della corruzione e generazione. “*La via all’insù e*

considered from an *omni-relational* point of view: Bruno needs to make sense of the experience of finite things in an infinite universe and he can only do it by indicating a discrete *substratum* that is the condition *for things to exist*, which exactly corresponds to saying *for things to be composed, ordered and measured* without reducing the *minimum* to a mere object that happens to be indefinitely small. The *minimum* «has no dimension» and, as such, it cannot be conceived as a small particle that adds up to an actual *object*. As Saverio Ansaldi puts it: «To each kind of being and to each form of life corresponds a minimum that defines the “nature” itself of the thing in question, starting from the incessant vicissitude and metamorphosis of the atoms. That is why the minimum allows us to explain the existence of the atom without thereby identifying itself necessarily with it. Without the combined action of the atoms, no “natures” would exist within the infinite matter, but each of these natures represents respectively a minimum if related to another greater nature (human nature is minimal if related to the nature of the sun)»⁸⁸. What Ansaldi here underlines is one of the most important aspects of the Brunian ontology, which frontally attacks the Aristotelian prominence of *form* over *matter*: the nature of a being is not provided by a *form* towards which things should strive in order to fulfil their intimate nature, indeed, the *form* emerges only once the compound has been intended in its internal relations dictated by the *vicissitude* of the universe and understood by the actor; there is no teleology, no preconceived end in the Brunian infinite universe. Bruno endorses some kind of materialism but a sort of materialism that needs to fit into his infinite picture and that accounts for the metamorphoses and the vicissitude that characterize the universe. The adoption of a simple materialism could not account for such a degree of

all'ingiù è una sola e medesima”, continua Eraclito, affermando, come i taoisti, la fondamentale unità di ogni coppia di opposti e la conseguente relatività di tutti i concetti».

⁸⁸ S. Ansaldi, *Giordano Bruno. Une philosophie de la métamorphose*, Éditions Classiques Garnier, Paris 2010, p. 238. My translation from French: «À chaque genre d'être et à chaque forme de vie correspond un minimum définissant la 'nature' même de la chose en question, à partir de la vicissitude et de la métamorphoses incessante des atomes. C'est pourquoi le minimum permet d'expliquer l'existence de l'atome sans pourtant s'identifier nécessairement avec lui. Sans l'action combinée des atomes, il n'existerait pas de 'natures' au sein de la matière infinie, mais chacune de ses natures représente à son tour un minimum par rapport à une autre nature plus grande (la nature humaine est minime par rapport à la nature du soleil)».

life, as it would leave the universe as a sum of inert bodies, which is exactly what Bruno dismantles from the very beginning. Michele Ciliberto stresses, while commenting on Bruno's Latin works written in Frankfurt, how the ontology developed in the Italian dialogue *De la Causa Principio et Uno* has finally reached maturity: «These are symptomatic texts on the conceptual and on the linguistic level. It is not by chance that Bruno's passage to a monism oriented in a clearly physical-immanent sense has been found here. This is true, but only in part. The Brunian monism is and remains structurally inscribed in the organic connection of absolute being and communicated being, of "shadow" and "light". It is here that that the bond between God and Infinite Life is tightened. Obscuring one of these two sides means depriving this position of one of its specific traits. In Bruno "material" and "corporeal" are not identified. This means that the valorisation of the bodily (of bodily matter) does not, as such, deprive the incorporeal (incorporeal matter) of foundation. They are both aspects of the same substance»⁸⁹. Ciliberto confirms our earlier claim that Bruno's ontology can only conceive the multiplicity of beings, what Ciliberto calls «communicated being», through a unity that is concealed, for it is not grasped through the determinations of duration and size, what Ciliberto calls «absolute being». It is the "light" of truth that is kept safe and it is only revealed through a "shadow", the image of its being hidden: the Heideggerian movement of truth as *unconcealment* encountered in Heidegger, finds here a further confirmation.

Bruno's philosophy is striking in that it functions as a mirror of the reality it is trying to account for: it does not provide a description of a static ontology, it does not announce a *truth* to be correctly met, it actually puts this truth into practice by

⁸⁹ M. Ciliberto, *Giordano Bruno*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2005, pp. 240-1. My translation from Italian: «Sono, questi, testi sintomatici sia sul piano concettuale che su quello linguistico. Non per caso, proprio qui si è individuato il passaggio di Bruno a un monismo orientato in senso nettamente fisico-immanentistico. Questo è vero, ma solo in parte. In effetti quello bruniano è, e resta, un monismo strutturalmente imperniato nella connessione organica di essere assoluto e di essere comunicato, di 'ombra' e di 'luce'. È qui che si stringe il nesso organico tra Dio e Vita infinita. Offuscare uno di questi lati, in un senso o nell'altro, vuol dire togliere a questa posizione il suo carattere specifico. In Bruno 'materiale' e 'corporeo' non si identificano. Il che vuol dire che la valorizzazione del corporeo (della materia corporea) non toglie, di per sé, fondamento all'incorporeo (alla materia incorporea). Sono l'uno e l'altro aspetti di una stessa sostanza».

progressively inhabiting all the faces truth presents itself with. That is why commentators such as Ciliberto often recall the importance of *light* and *shadow* when dealing with Bruno, which applies to his writings, where all affirmations are never absolute but work as *shadows*, understood *extensively*, created by a *light* that can never be captured as it is always understood *intensively*, concealed. We, philosophers, are part of this shadowy game and have to move within it; our effort is to manage where Admetus failed, bearing two thoughts at once. In the case of *matter*, then, Bruno is not inverting the ontological role of *matter* and *form* in order to object to Aristotle. Rather, he shifts from a point of view of *difference* to a point of view of *identity* and vice versa in order to make sense of the universe. Before going deeper into the notion of *shadow*, which will be explored in Chapter V, we should take a look at the foundations of the Brunian ontology as expressed in *De la Causa, Principio et Uno*. Here the dialectic of *identity* and *difference* is clarified by the distinction between *Cause* and *Principle*, as Dicsono exposes them to a complacent Teofilo, who is Bruno's mouthpiece:

I think you take 'principle' to be that which intrinsically contributes to the constitution of things and remains in the effect, as they say of matter and form, which remain in the composite, or else the elements from which a thing is composed and into which a thing is resolved. You call 'cause' that which contributes to the production of things from outside, and which exists outside the composition, as is the case of the efficient cause, and of the end to which the thing produced is directed.⁹⁰

It is customary for Bruno to make use of well-established concepts. In this passage he refers to the Aristotelian four causes in order to twist them to his own advantage. Here the difference between *Cause* and *Principle* is very neat: the former is characterized as transcendent and it embraces efficient and final causality, the latter is characterized as immanent and embraces matter and form. While setting the stage, Bruno seems to proceed in a rather ordinary metaphysical manner, clarifying the main concepts he will adopt throughout his dialogue and on which his ontological

⁹⁰ G. Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity, and Essays on Magic*, p. 37.

system is going to be built. Indeed, he will introduce some rather widespread Neoplatonic terminology and inscribe it within the aforementioned Aristotelian notions. Nevertheless, that is a mere appearance, which is necessary for Bruno's ontology to function and for establishing the *light/shadow* game that we shall explore deeply in the second Part of this work. As we shall often make note of, Bruno adopts Aristotelian and Neoplatonic terms in order to disembowel them, flatten them and render them suitable for the *vicissitudinal* and transient nature of *truth*, often even adopting neologisms, in open contrast with «grammarians» and «pedants». His lexicon, thus, is highly experimental, as Saiber rightly summarizes: «In sum, Bruno's motivation for such linguistic labour was to convey his notion that the “realest” language is the one most able to express the multiplicity of human thoughts, feelings and inventions and most able to express the infinite variety of nature. Agrimi⁹¹, building on Ciliberto's study, notes Bruno's continual use of polisemy, homography, graphic oscillation and semantic mobility to help further his effort to name and describe the innumerable things and thoughts – as well as their ineffable essences –

⁹¹ Saiber is here referring to the work by Mario Agrimi, “Giordano Bruno, filosofo del linguaggio”, in *Studi filosofici* 2 (1979), Olschki, Firenze 1981, p. 113, 131: «For Bruno, then, the linguistic “front” is the essential strategic line of his philosophical battle, fought exactly through the subversion of artificial linguistic and literary modes, thus against a superficial and empty use of language, devoid of semantic mobility and incapable of innovating itself» and – quoting M. Ciliberto, *Lessico di Giordano Bruno*, Edizioni dell' Ateneo & Vizzarri, Prima edizione (First Edition) edizione (1 gennaio 1979), p. XL – p. 131: «“the voice *soul* refers to *spirit* and *body*; that of *body* to *world* and *universe*; that of *universe* to *infinite* and *one*; we are speaking of intertwined correspondences: *body* refers to *spirit*; *world* to *soul*; *universe* to *body*; *infinite* to *world*; *one* to *universe*. And again: *soul* refers to *form*, *form* to *intellect*, both refer to *universe*. On a different level, *wisdom* refers to *ignorance*; *madness* to *asinità* [donkey-hood: *ed.*]; *water* to *earth*, *air* and *fire*, which refers to *sun* and *earth*, and again, through this path, to *world* and *universe*”». My translation from Italian: «Per Bruno, quindi, il “fronte” linguistico è linea strategica essenziale della sua battaglia filosofica, combattuta appunto attraverso l'eversione di modi linguistici e letterari artefatti, contro cioè un uso della lingua superficiale e vuoto, privo di mobilità semantica e incapace di innovarsi» and «“la voce *anima* rimanda a *spirito* e *corpo*; quella di *corpo* a *mondo* e *universo*; quella di *universo* a *infinito* e *uno*. Si tratta di corrispondenze intrecciate: *corpo* rimanda a *spirito*; *mondo* ad *anima*; *universo* a *corpo*; *infinito* a *mondo*; *uno* a *universo*. E ancora: *anima* rimanda a *forma*, *forma* a *intelletto*, entrambe rinviano a *universo*. Su un altro piano, *sapienza* rimanda a *ignoranza*; *pazzia* ad *asinità*; *acqua* rimanda a *terra*, *aria* e *fuoco*, il quale rinvia a *sole* e *terra*, e, di nuovo, per questa via, a *mondo* e *universo*”».

of a universe of innumerable possible forms»⁹². Bruno refuses to reduce language to a mere scientific tool; he wishes to capture what is minor, what is irrelevant, the bits and pieces of reality, what he calls *minuzzarie*. The innumerable *forms* of his changing reality, indeed, are called forth by *matter* itself in virtue of the Neoplatonic notion of Universal Intellect, which does not act univocally but as both Cause and Principle. As a Cause:

DICSONO. The aim, the final cause which is sought by the efficient [cause], is the perfection of the universe, which consists of all forms having actual material existence; the intellect delights and takes such pleasure in pursuing this goal, that it never tires of calling forth from matter all sorts of forms, as Empedocles himself seems to maintain.

TEOFILO. Quite right, and I add that, just as this efficient [cause] is universal in the universe, but specific and particular in the universe's parts and members, so are also its form and its purpose.⁹³

Here, in perfect Neoplatonic fashion, the Universal Intellect seems to be extrinsic and act as efficient Cause, shaping *matter* according to pre-existing *forms*. But that is not the end of the story:

TEOFILO. [...] we said, in fact, that the intellect, which is a potency of the world soul, is the proximate efficient cause of all natural things.

DICSONO. But how can the same subject be principle and cause of natural things? How can it have the character of an intrinsic part and not that of an extrinsic part?

TEOFILO. That is no contradiction, if we consider that the soul is in the body as the pilot is in the ship: since the pilot is part of the ship⁹⁴, he moves with it; yet, considering that he governs and moves it, he must not be included as a part but as a distinct efficient cause. Likewise, the soul of the universe, in so far as it animates and informs it, is found to be an intrinsic and formal part of the universe, but in so far as it directs and governs

⁹² A. Saiber, *Giordano Bruno and the Geometry of Language*, p. 54.

⁹³ G. Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity, And Essays on Magic*, p. 40.

⁹⁴ This image is borrowed from Averroes who, already appreciated in the Middle Ages, seemed to enjoy a particular success in Renaissance Italy, as Hasse holds: «In Renaissance Italy, Averroism for several reasons acquired an intensity and dynamism unparalleled in the Middle Ages. First of all, the number of Renaissance Averroists was simply larger than that of their medieval predecessors [...]. Then, too, the Averroist current is more frequently the object of attack in the Renaissance than in the medieval period. And, most importantly, it is only in the Renaissance that the doctrinal direction of the Averroist school is challenged and debated openly within the school». From D. N. Hasse, "Arabic philosophy and Averroism", in J. Hankins (edited by), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, p. 117.

the universe, it is not a part, and does not have the character of principle, but of a cause.⁹⁵

Both Aristotelian and Neoplatonic notions are merged and reinvented, as Bruno's fundamental intuition is that metaphysical concepts cannot be exhausted in a univocal manner as, for instance, «the efficient cause works from within, remaining distinct only because it is not exhausted by the particular thing it produces; and the final cause is that which assures the “perfection of the universe”»⁹⁶. Whereas in Plotinus the Universal Intellect and the World Soul are separate notions, in Bruno they become one, yet under different points of view: the Universal Intellect is the World Soul understood operatively. Through these premises we can finally see that the transcendence carried by the notion of *form* is such only while *matter* in-forms it, as the very fact of being *material* implies having a *form* and thus being *animate*. And if *matter*, as we saw while examining the evolution of Bruno's thought in the later *De minimo*, is subject to the *vicissitude* of aggregation and disintegration, then the *forms* are not eternal and pre-established prototypes of things and the *soul* is not part of an immaterial and transcendent world and yet *matter* itself has all the possible *forms* in its womb. The World Soul, as a matter of fact, permeates the one *substance* according to the principle of *contraction* – concept of Cusanian descent⁹⁷ – and is in every *thing* according to the principle of *explication* mirroring the *intensive* and *extensive*

⁹⁵ G. Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity, And Essays on Magic*, p. 40.

⁹⁶ S. Greenberg, *The Infinite in Giordano Bruno*, p. 25.

⁹⁷ Although the concept is indeed of Cusanian descent, it is dubitable whether Bruno actually derives it primarily from Cusanus. According to Leo Catana the Cusanian doctrine is actually absent in Bruno's earlier works, from *De umbris* (1582) to *Sigillus sigillorum* (1583) and *De la causa* (1584): «The affinities between contraction in the relevant passage in *De umbris* and contraction in Cusanus' *De docta ignorantia* ii 6 could then be read as an indication of Bruno's admiration for Cusanus' polemics against Aristotelian and scholastic philosophy – though without implying that Bruno shared Cusanus' interpretation of contraction. [...] Bruno revised the idea of matter through his reading of Plotinus' *Enneads* II iv, conflating intelligible and corporeal matter and emphasizing the active potentiality of matter. Bruno incorporated Cusanus' principle of coincidence of opposites into this idea of matter. On the basis of an interpretation of contraction as the one found in Giles and Bruno's own interpretations of Plotinus' notion of matter, Bruno could give a pantheistic account of the relationship between unity and multiplicity, which was distinct from the Christian version Cusanus had presented in his *De docta ignorantia*». From L. Catana, *The Concept of Contraction in Giordano Bruno's Philosophy*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2005, p. 152.

perspectives of the *infinite*. There is no qualitative difference between an onion, a cat and a human: they all are *animated* in this sense; it is the *vicissitudinal* destiny of *matter* that gives them a particular *form* and degree of animation. Bruno even provides a biblical grounding for his theory in the fourth dialogue of the *De la Causa*, which sounds vaguely Heideggerian in tone:

But nature produces everything out of its own matter by means of separation, parturition and effluxion, as the Pythagoreans thought, as Anaxagoras and Democritus understood and the sages of Babylon confirmed. Moses, himself, also subscribes to their opinion when, describing the generation of the things ordered by the universal efficient cause, he speaks thus: “Let the earth bring forth its animals, let the waters bring forth living creatures”⁹⁸. It is as if he had said: Let matter bring them forth.⁹⁹

It is not by accident that in *De minimo* Bruno ties the notion of *minimum* to the faculties of *man* as a measurer and an organizer: *man* does not dwell outside of the World Soul, he is qualitatively coincident with other beings. *Man*’s alleged “mastery of nature”, which characterizes the modern *subject*, in Bruno becomes meaningless for *man* is also brought forth by *matter*, although with a particular configuration that allows him to impose his dominion upon other beings, yet not on *nature*.

We shall probably find what is left of *man* in Bruno’s concept of *individual*, which we would call *weak* or, simply, not *substantial*, in the sense that the *individual* in Bruno is not conceived as ὑποκείμενον, which makes a theory of the *subject* impossible to begin with. Yet, Bruno does account for individuality, as Filippo Mignini rightly argues: «A sort of general definition of individual as an indivisible unity of a multiplicity recurs in the fourth dialogue of the *De la Causa*¹⁰⁰, precisely relatively to the need of considering “individual” any being that should be thought as

⁹⁸ Paraphrase of Genesis I, 20 and 24.

⁹⁹ G. Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity, and Essays on Magic*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁰ The passage Mignini refers to is the following: «DICSONO. Then, everything which comprises all the genuses is indivisible? TEOFILO. Exactly, because the form which comprises all figures does not itself possess any; that which possesses all sensible being is not, for that reason, accessible to the senses. That which possesses all natural being is highly indivisible; that which possesses all intellectual being is still more highly indivisible; that which possesses all that can be is the most highly indivisible of all» from *ibid.*, p. 79.

implying or comprising a multiplicity in its own nature. Such indivisibility coincides exactly with the indifference of that being towards everything of which it is an actual unity. The indivisibility of such a being is not opposed to its being participated as, on the contrary, its simultaneous essential being participated and indivisibility are rendered possible by its indifference and indeterminacy»¹⁰¹. The *individual* is, therefore, the indifferent *unity* of a *multiplicity*, as it does not make sense to speak of an individual by referring to its parts, even though the individual *is* the unity of many parts, *extensively*; that is why, even though the one and infinite *substance* is the highest type of individual, its *individuality* is not qualitatively different – and thus not *substantial* – from the individuality of an animal or a stone; it simply is an infinitely greater individuality of which minor individualities are *contractions*. Again, the theory of the *minimum* in this light makes even more sense not as a principle of *divisibility* but as a principle of *composition*, as we saw earlier in this chapter. There is, therefore, no ontological hierarchy amongst individuals, which enjoy the same dignity as participating in the World Soul, and that includes *man* and *human nature*, which becomes the result of an ever developing *anthropogenesis*: «In the *De Immenso*¹⁰², Bruno also develops a theory of anthropogenesis that gives an account of

¹⁰¹ F. Mignini, *La dottrina dell'individuo in Cusano e in Bruno*, in Bruniana & Campanelliana. A. 6, n. 2 (2000), Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, Pisa 2000, p. 340. My translation from Italian: «Una sorta di definizione generale dell'individuo come unità indivisibile di un molteplice ricorre nel quarto dialogo del *De la causa*, precisamente in riferimento all'esigenza di considerare 'individuo' qualsiasi ente che debba essere pensato come implicante o comprendente nella sua natura un molteplice. Tale indivisibilità coincide esattamente con l'indifferenza di quell'ente rispetto a tutto ciò di cui è unità attuale. L'indivisibilità di un tale ente non si oppone alla sua partecipabilità, perché, al contrario, la simultanea partecipabilità essenziale e indivisibilità sono rese possibili dalla sua indifferenza o indeterminatezza».

¹⁰² «As in the individual the power of all is found; as in the simple homogeneity of the seed the power of composition and of the heterogeneity of animal and vegetal organisms is found, so in the simplicity of the soul is found the active power of life that we accordingly name motion not according to a unique and simple difference but in a universal sense, according to all the differences [...]» from G. Bruno, *De immenso in Opera latine conscripta*, p. 291. My translation from Latin and rendition in prose, also based on the Italian translation of Carlo Monti, in G. Bruno, *Opere latine*, Mondadori, Milano 2008, p. 640:

«Sicut autem in individuo est potentia totius dimensi, ut in simplicitate seminis et homogeneitate est potentia compositionis et eterogeneitatis animalis vel plantae, sic in simplicitate animae est potentia activa omnis actus vitae, quem nunc pro more motum dicere vo-

the power of human nature as a whole. Human nature is the *product*, always in metamorphosis, of the incessant action of the living infinite matter. Human nature has been engendered by the natural metamorphosis of atoms and *minima* and it continues to be permanently subject to the laws of transformation»¹⁰³. There is no fixed human nature because there is no fixed configuration of *man*, who becomes a manipulator of *nature* because of his bodily configuration and he possesses a *hand* as the configuration of the world offers him things to be grabbed and manipulated; *man* is for the same reason a measurer and a thinking being and all these features and their malleable meaning are deeply historical, as they are founded in the *vicissitude*. Bruno would, then, consider it a mistake to try and determine human nature by dissecting and analysing the individual because once it is dissected, the individual is lost; he would also deem it absurd to formulate a fixed notion of human nature based on a transcendent *soul*, as that very *soul* cannot be fixed nor transcendent, for it is brought forth by the incessant *vicissitude* of the *living, infinite, matter*¹⁰⁴.

lumus, non secundum unam et singularem, sed secundum omnes universaliter differentias».

¹⁰³ S. Ansaldi, *Giordano Bruno. Une philosophie de la métamorphose*, p. 247. My translation from French: «Dans le *De immenso*, Bruno développe ainsi une théorie de l’anthropogenèse qui rend raison de la puissance de la nature humaine dans son ensemble. La nature humaine est le *produit*, toujours en métamorphose, de l’action incessante de la matière vivante infinie. La nature humaine a été engendrée par la métamorphose naturelle des atomes et des minima et continue à en subir en permanence le lois de transformation».

¹⁰⁴ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, another central figure of the Renaissance, had also argued for an indeterminate nature of mankind, although arguing on completely different grounds – the freedom granted by God – with respect to Bruno. As Pico himself affirms in his 1486 *Oratio de hominis dignitate* [Oration on the Dignity of Man] while, as God’s mouthpiece, addressing *man*: «‘[...] We created you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal so that you, almost voluntary and honorary sculptor and shaper of yourself, could shape yourself the way you wish. You could degenerate in inferior beings, which are brute; you could be regenerated, according to your soul, in superior beings, which are divine’. Oh greatest liberality of Father God, greatest and admirable happiness of man, to whom is given to have whatever he pleases, to be whatever he wishes to be!». From G. Pico della Mirandola, *Discorso sulla dignità dell’uomo*, edited and with a translation in Italian by F. Bausi, Fondazione Pietro Bembo / Ugo Guanda Editore, pp. 10-12. My translation from Latin: «‘[...] Nec te celestem neque terrenum, neque mortalem, neque immortalem fecimus, ut, tui ipsius quasi arbitrarius honorariusque plastes et fctor, in quam malueris tute formam effingas. Poteris in inferiora, quae sunt bruta, degenerare; poteris in superiora, quae sunt divina, ex tui animi sententia degenerari’. O summam Dei patris liberalitatem, summam et admirandam hominis foelicitatem, cui datum id habere quod optat, id esse quod velit!».

Our path through Bruno's ontology has provided us with a perspective on science and modernity that is alternative to Heidegger's history of metaphysics. Furthermore, operating without reference to a *subject*, we saw that Bruno anticipates, although using a language that remains profoundly metaphysical, those traits that will be characteristic of Heidegger's notion of truth as *unconcealment*. What is striking is that such *thinking* is inspired by the very scientific revolution that Heidegger saw as a threat to his notion of truth. Had Heidegger considered the history of metaphysics in a less deterministic manner, he could have spotted similar results. That also seems to be the case with Spinoza, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Chapter III – Difference

Section 1 – *Mos geometricus*

Our encounter with Bruno has shown a philosophical practice that rejects a role as “scientist’s appendix”: the philosopher understands himself as centre of *intensity* in order to account for the infinite variety of experience. The most mature exponent of Renaissance culture seems to be pushing metaphysics away from the destiny Heidegger envisages. The notion of “*end of philosophy*” was presented in Chapter I as not reducible to a moment in time: if it is not understood through duration, it is therefore an *intensive* notion, which indicates the *end* coinciding with the whole history of metaphysics as a constitutive feature. Yet Bruno and the Renaissance culture behind him express a different drive running through the history of philosophy, which, however historically – thus *extensively* – defeated, is structurally part of metaphysical thinking. Spinoza’s alleged «*peculiar one-sidedness*»¹⁰⁵ is presented by Heidegger as a sufficient reason for a quick dismissal from his history of metaphysics, thereby narrowing his relevance to be merely functional to an understanding of German Idealism within the perspective of a Greco-Germanic destiny of philosophy. As Krell rightly affirms: «The epochality of Heidegger’s history of being preserves traces of a certain teleological thinking, especially in what it “forecloses” for thinking. Derrida sees such foreclosure at work in Heidegger’s interpretation of the Platonic $\chi\omega\rho\alpha$ as a preparation of the Cartesian interpretation of beings in space as *extensio*, and also in Heidegger’s tendency to exclude recalcitrant figures from the history of being, figures such as Spinoza, who cannot be readily subordinated to the epoch of subjectivity»¹⁰⁶. Spinoza twists and de-structures the Cartesian premises of *modernity*. Just as Bruno produced a whole new possibility for

¹⁰⁵ See n. 54.

¹⁰⁶ D. Farrell Krell, *Daimon Life. Heidegger and Life-Philosophy*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1992, pp. 267-268.

thinking by opening up the old and sclerotic metaphysical structures to the *infinity* of the universe, so Spinoza bends the rigid laws of *reason* and *logic* to the infinite possibilities of production for *man* by moving back from the *epistemological* ground to the *ontological* one. Through Heidegger's critique of metaphysics and through our first approach to Bruno we have realized that granting *man* the status of *subject* – and therefore ontological foundation of the real – forces any *thinking* within the epistemological cage of *method* as it restricts any further access to *Being*. Through his encounter with Copernicus, Bruno has shown *science* to be an opportunity for *man* to establish a state of proximity with *nature* without losing himself and without recurring to Cartesian isolation and dualism. Such an understanding of *man* and of his place can only occur by *thinking* him already within the operational truth of *Being*, *i.e.* immersed in the disclosing life of the world, and not by bracketing life through methodological doubt. Cartesian doubt, as we saw, presupposes its outcome as it empowers the doubter to distance and negate everything that can be an object of doubt, thereby identifying what is left, the *subject*, as a *foundation* on which, through the work of reason, an absolutely certain knowledge can be built. Yet, certainty is a prerogative of doubt. Spinoza, on the other hand, *one-sidedly* – as Heidegger would have it – engages with *foundation* or *ground* in all its actuality and full complexity and not with its reduction. Spinoza, as a philosopher and as a *man*, inhabits the world, just like Bruno, and seeks to understand *nature* from within. We shall see how the *mos geometricus*, which characterizes Spinoza's *Ethics*, is not a foundational *method* at all: we shall also see how *substance* is already displayed in its full existence and complexity and how Spinoza's rigorous *logic* is not superimposed on reality but on the understanding.

Heidegger's criticism of Descartes suggests that the foundation of Descartes' philosophy, the *cogitans*, is reached precisely through an arbitrarily pre-determined method; the proximity to Being is obliterated because the ontological problem is closed up and reduced to a merely epistemological one before even being addressed.

Spinoza, on the other hand, sets a different pace from the very beginning, starting from his very first *definitions* in *Ethics I*:

1. By that which is self-caused I mean that whose essence involves existence or that whose nature can be conceived only as existing.
2. A thing is said to be finite in its own kind [*in suo genere finita*] when it can be limited by another thing of the same nature. For example, a body is said to be finite because we can always conceive of another body greater than it. So, too, a thought is limited by another thought. But body is not limited by thought, nor thought by body.
3. By substance I mean that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed.¹⁰⁷

We should not give in to the temptation of imagining the *thinker* who is trying to capture an alien reality: from the very beginning it is made clear, as in Bruno, that the *infinite* cannot be understood through *finite* notions. Spinoza is manifesting the power of what he can or cannot conceive when dealing with existence as a whole, absolutely aware of his position and of his starting point. The first and most difficult effort, perhaps, when dealing with Spinoza, is to try not to assume we are talking of some *thing* that constitutes the *ground* of our reality and that is more general or more universal than all particular things we experience, which is one of the erroneous notions of *Being* Heidegger denounces in *Sein und Zeit*. There is no rift between Spinoza's enunciation of it and its display in existence. It is crucial that, while talking about Spinoza, we make the effort of *thinking* each time that we are dealing with a *substance* that is «self-caused [...] whose essence involves existence». It makes no sense to doubt it, for we can only doubt what is not necessarily *existent* and that is not the case of *substance*. That is exactly why Descartes misses the point, that is why all he has left is *method*, because he thinks that by bracketing reality on the basis of his own criterion of certainty, he could somehow grasp something that is, on the other hand, alien to the notion of doubt. This does not mean that Spinoza does not apply any method at all, indeed, his *Ethics* is demonstrated *more geometrico*, through the

¹⁰⁷ B. Spinoza, "Ethics", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, translated by S. Shirley, edited by M. L. Morgan, Hackett, Indianapolis 2002, p. 217.

geometrical method, but the method is not established as the standard of essence or existence. Deleuze underlines this point particularly well in his Spinozist vocabulary: «METHOD. – 1. The aim is not to make something known to us, but to make us understand our power of knowing. It is a matter of becoming conscious of this power: a reflexive knowledge or an idea of the idea. But since the idea of the idea is worth what the first idea is worth, this *prise de conscience* assumes that we first have a true idea of some kind. It matters little which idea; it can be an idea that involves a fiction, such as that of a geometric being. It will enable us to understand our power of knowing all the better, without reference to a real object»¹⁰⁸. Spinoza's starting point is ostensive: it is not dubitative or cogitative, it is a practical move; *method* arranges and demonstrates the power and the operational range of existence.

It is not our purpose here to give a full account of Spinoza's *oeuvre* but to arrive at that level of engagement that is necessary for us to *think* alternatively with respect to the Cartesian model of modernity. In the case of Spinoza the relationship between existence and *method* is crucial for capturing such opportunity: at first glance we might consider that Spinoza is operating a mathematisation of *nature*, which seems to make him a perfectly modern thinker, just like Galileo and Descartes. On the other hand, Spinoza's affinity to Bruno will progressively emerge – something that, after all, was also obvious to Heidegger¹⁰⁹. We saw that Bruno's *mathematics* does not function according to abstraction, *i.e.* by expecting *nature* to follow models based on isolated *objects* whose relations are strictly calculated in virtue of the fact that they are treated as ideal *objects*, e.g. the bodies falling from the leaning tower of Pisa. Bruno's mathematics of *numeration* works by understanding beings *relationally*, where the *relation* is not mere contact between separate bodies but the dynamic ontological determination of the *minimum*. Now, the particular kind of *relation* examined in the *Ethics* is the *causal* one. Spinoza's thinking, as we affirmed, is not looking for a *ground* that is guaranteed by *certainty* simply because he does not need

¹⁰⁸ G. Deleuze, *Spinoza. Practical Philosophy*, translated by R. Hurley, City Lights, San Francisco 1988, p. 83.

¹⁰⁹ See n. 54.

it: he is not dissecting, analysing or, worse, doubting reality, he is indeed figuring and synthesizing it. Such an approach forces him to begin from undemonstrated *definitions*, which are a cause of perplexity amongst his commentators: how can Spinoza base his whole philosophical construction on arbitrary and undemonstrated definitions? The eyes of the logician are rather short-sighted, in this instance; if we wish to have an answer, the eyes of the philosopher are surely more rewarding. Let us listen to Spinoza himself, in his reply to his friend Simon de Vries:

There is the definition that serves to explicate a thing whose essence alone is in question and the object of doubt, and there is the definition which is put forward simply for examination. The former, since it has a determinate object, must be a true definition, while this need not be so in the latter case. For example, if one were to ask me for a description of Solomon's temple, I ought to give him a true description, unless I propose to talk nonsense with him. But if I have in my own mind formed the design of a temple that I want to build, and from its description I conclude that I will have to purchase such-and-such a site and so many thousands of stones and other materials, will any sane person tell me that I have reached a wrong conclusion because my definition may be incorrect? [...] Therefore a definition either explicates a thing as it exists outside the intellect [...] or it explicates a thing as it is conceived by us or can be conceived. And in that case it also differs from an axiom and proposition in requiring merely that it be conceived, not conceived as true, as in the case of an axiom.¹¹⁰

The *definitions* offered in the *Ethics* are of the former kind, where a determinate object is under examination. Their *truth* is given by their actual existence and not by assigning them a logical truth-value: we are presented with no abstract standard of *certitude* to measure them against; their *existence* is not dependent upon a propositional *truth*. This pushes Spinoza very far from Descartes, who doubts the very *existence* of the outer world – including his own body – in order to rationally establish that very standard against which the whole reality should be tested. As Nadler puts it: «He [Spinoza: *ed.*] does not take himself only to be showing what are the extended implications of a number of stipulated but not necessarily true definitions. On the contrary, he sees the *Ethics* as laying out the truth. The book is about reality: its nature, its structure, its operations and the implications of these for

¹¹⁰ B. Spinoza, "Letter 9. To the learned young man Simon de Vries, from B.d.S.", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, pp. 781-782.

human happiness. In Part One, he is not just saying: “If you will assume for the sake of argument that this is what ‘substance’, ‘God’ and ‘attribute’ are, then it will follow that God is the only substance and is identical with Nature.” Rather, he is saying: “This is how ‘substance’, ‘God’ and ‘attribute’ *should* be understood, if defined truly; and therefore it is the case that God is the only substance and is identical with Nature.” Naturally, one will want to know *how* Spinoza can be so sure [...] that these definitions are true. [...] It seems that Spinoza thinks that the definitions are self-evidently true»¹¹¹. The expression «self-evidently true» might be slightly misleading for those who think we are talking of a logical or propositional truth: *definitions* in the *Ethics* are the very image of our power of conceiving reality within our originary nearness to it, they are not a logical abstraction. The easiest error we can commit is to interpret Spinoza through the scientific eyes of our modernity, where living reality is only true starting from its correspondence to a scientific model. Modern science, as the analytic representation of reality based on mathematical models, is never originary, as what is most originary is the creation and production of reality, according to which Spinoza provides his highest *thinking* effort. *Definitions*, then, are an engaging access to the *Ethics*, which shows no need to be transcendently *grounded* because it is already rooted in reality.

In the famous Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*, Spinoza provides a recapitulation and a clarification of how he is trying to rid philosophy and thinking of all those anthropomorphic, teleological and finalistic notions we are imbued with. Within this important passage we would like to focus, once more, on the role of *method* and its relation to *Being*. Protesting against those who find it easier to relegate everything they do not understand to the divine sphere, Spinoza suggests:

Hence they made it axiomatic that the judgement of the god is far beyond man’s understanding. Indeed, it is for this reason, and this reason only, that truth might have evaded mankind forever had not Mathematics, which is concerned not with ends but

¹¹¹ S. Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics. An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2006, pp. 47-48.

only with the essences and properties of figures, revealed to men a different standard of truth.¹¹²

Spinoza's notion of *mathematics* is not based on *calculation*; it is concerned with *properties*, with what figures and things *can* do. Spinoza's look is oriented *synthetically* and not *analytically*, antithetically to Descartes and Galileo. Francesco Valerio underlines how the method revolving around a *subjectivity* is abstracted from the *thing*, the *being* itself: «What matters the most in the thinking exercise of the doubting subjectivity is not the “thing” but the *method through which the thing has been found*. In this sense Heidegger's analysis of the foundations of the modern epoch surely hits the right spot, when it underlines the ‘primacy of method’ as the essential constitutive trait of subjectivity. This, as a matter of fact, handles the being of things positing itself as its *fundamentum inconcussum*. *Analysis* methodically guarantees the *theoretical prominence of the subject*, of the *cogito*, and with it the very possibility of making the describing thread that is extended between *finite being* and *infinite being* around subjectivity»¹¹³. As was seen in Bruno, the importance of mathematics is fundamental to the author's thinking and, nevertheless, it is not the kind of mathematics practised in modern thinking: it is a philosophical mathematics *ontologically* based on the *things* themselves and not around *subjectivity*. Just like in geometry, Spinoza works on the operational properties of reality in their infinite actuality of relating and being affected. It is in virtue of such relations and affections that the geometrical method displays its full potential as offering the tools of *synthesis* that can account for the multiple properties and the *omni-relational*

¹¹² B. Spinoza, “Ethics”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 240.

¹¹³ F. Valerio, “Heidegger, Spinoza e il «problema della soggettività»”, in G. Semerari, *Confronti con Heidegger*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari 1992, pp. 216-217. My translation from Italian: «Ciò che, nell'esercizio di pensiero della soggettività dubitante più importa, non è la ‘cos’, ma *il metodo col quale è stata trovata*. In tal senso l'analisi heideggeriana dei fondamenti dell'Epoca moderna coglie certamente nel segno, quando sottolinea il ‘ primato del metodo’ come tratto essenziale costituente la soggettività. Questa, infatti, dispone dell'essere delle cose ponendosi al contempo come suo *fundamentum inconcussum*. L'analisi garantisce metodicamente la *preminenza teorica del soggetto*, del *cogito*, e con essa la possibilità di far ruotare intorno alla soggettività la trama espositiva che si estende tra l'*essere finito* e l'*essere infinito*».

character of the world. The debate between Spinoza and Tschirnhaus is illuminating in this sense, as Tschirnhaus asks Spinoza to explain how he can derive *a priori* the variety of the world from his definition of Extension, considering that Descartes finds no better way than taking God as a first mover:

[Tschirnhaus] In mathematics I have always observed that from any thing considered in itself – that is, from the definition of any thing – we are able to deduce at least one property; but if we wish to deduce more properties, we have to relate the thing defined to other things. It is only then, from the combination of the definitions of these things, that new properties emerge. [...] This seems to be at variance, to some extent with Proposition 16 of the *Ethics*¹¹⁴, almost the most important proposition of your Treatise. In this proposition it is taken for granted that several properties can be deduced from the given definition of any thing, which seems to me impossible if we do not relate the thing defined to other things. In consequence, I fail to see how from an Attribute considered by itself, Extension, for example, an infinite variety of things can arise.¹¹⁵

[Spinoza] As to what you add, from the definition of any thing, considered in itself, we can deduce only one property, this may hold good in the case of the most simple things, or in the case of mental constructs (*entia rationis*), in which I include figures, but not in the case of real things. Simply from the fact that I define God as an Entity to whose essence existence belongs, I infer several properties of him, such as that he necessarily exists, that he is one alone, immutable, infinite, etc.¹¹⁶

Tschirnhaus is thinking abstractly by treating real *things* as geometrical figures and thus missing the point of Prop. 16 of Part I. Geometrical figures are within the realm of the mathematician; Spinoza, on the other hand, deals with real things immersed in

¹¹⁴ «**Proposition 16**

From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinite things in infinite ways [modis] (that is, everything that can come within the scope of infinite intellect).

Proof This proposition should be obvious to everyone who will but consider this point, that from the given definition of any one thing the intellect infers a number of properties which necessarily follow, in fact, from the definition (that is, from the very essence of the thing), and the more reality the definition of the thing expresses (that is, the more reality the essence of the thing defined involves), the greater the number of its properties. Now, since divine nature possesses absolutely infinite attributes (Def. 6), of which each one also expresses infinite essence in its own kind, then there must necessarily follow from the necessity of the divine nature an infinity of things in infinite ways (that is, everything that can come within the scope of the infinite intellect)» from B. Spinoza, “Ethics”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 227.

¹¹⁵ E.W. von Tschirnhaus, “Letter 82. To the acute and learned philosopher B.d.S.”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 957.

¹¹⁶ B. Spinoza, “Letter 83. To the most noble and learned Mr. Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus, from B.d.S.”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 958.

the *omni-relational* activity of existence. In the case of Prop. 16, divine nature is the very source of all possible relations among things or, to use a Neoplatonic term, their being understood in *contraction*. Furthermore, geometrical figures, such as circles, are the *effect* of *fictitious causes* inferred by the mathematician – the movement of a line’s endpoint around a centre – whereas causal relations in reality are not fictions, they are our real understanding of the operational activity of the world: we relate the vase falling to the hand pushing it. And even in the case Tschirnhaus observes, which is the case of the Attribute – *substance* seen under one *kind* of *infinity* – we are not dealing with an external and fictional cause that somehow aids us in our understanding of it, as we understand it from being involved in it and not through the external eye of the mathematician, who can fictitiously cause the generation of a circle. The things belonging to the variety of the world – the *modes* – are the *substance* understood through one of its *attributes*. Within that *variety*, in which they are understood, they are not isolated and fictional *entia rationis*. That is the reason why existence cannot be attributed necessarily to the *essence* of single *modes* but only to the *substance* that expresses them, which is the only entity whose essence necessarily implies existence and can be the only cause of itself in its infinite variety. Deleuze provides a further clarification of this point: «In taking Absolute Infinity as a cause, we are not postulating, as for a rotating semicircle, something that lies outside its concept. It involves no fiction to consider modes in their infinite variety as properties jointly deduced from the definition of substance, and attributes as points of view internal to the substance on which they are substance on which they are so many views. So that, if philosophy is amenable to mathematical treatment, this is because mathematics finds its usual limitations overcome in philosophy»¹¹⁷. We find that Spinoza, just like Bruno, is well aware of the difference between a mathematician and a philosopher and that philosophy is not exhausted in mathematics or in what is strictly delimited by *method* and reduced to an *epistemological* problem.

¹¹⁷ G. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, translated by Martin Joughin, Zone Books, New York 1992, p. 22.

Section 2 – Infinity of the attributes, dignity of the modes

We have encountered *substance* only incidentally so far. The reason is that it was necessary to pave the way for the encounter with *substance*, to establish a practice that would do away with the temptations of approaching it as ὑποκείμενον, as another version of abstract *ground* on which the whole of reality is founded. We shall attempt to show how *substance* does not need to found or to be founded, in virtue of its own articulation as reality itself that requires nothing outside of itself. Bearing such a thought in mind, let us follow three further definitions Spinoza provides us with:

4. By attribute I mean that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence.

5. By mode I mean the affections of substance, that is, that which is in something else and is conceived through something else.

6. By God I mean an absolutely infinite being, that is, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence.

Explication I say “absolutely infinite”, not “infinite in its kind”. For if a thing is only infinite in its kind, one may deny that it has infinite attributes. But if a thing is absolutely infinite, whatever expresses essence and does not involve any negation belongs to its essence.¹¹⁸

We witness the appearance of *substance*, *attributes* and *modes* intimately intertwined with the notion of the *infinite*. We are compelled to engage in a thorough understanding of the notion of the *infinite*, in order to make easier our nearness to *substance* and its articulation. On the notion of the *infinite*, just as we observed in Bruno, the *ontological* problem unfolds and marks a deep distinction between Cartesian modernity and Spinozism. The difficulty of approaching Spinoza for the modern reader lies not so much in the nitpicking analysis of the validity of his logical arguments but in the effort of *thinking* the two thoughts of *substance* and *modes* at once. Spinoza does not employ Admetus’ stratagem of separating what he cannot

¹¹⁸ B. Spinoza, “Ethics”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 217.

seem to think at once; he shows no need for a dialectics and no need to have a counterparty in the *ontological* or in the *knowing* activity. The distinction between *absolutely infinite* and *infinite in its kind* provides the first access to our understanding of this new scenario.

The problem of *infinity* is actively explicated in the relationship between *substance* and its *attributes*, which is one of the great issues that distinguishes Spinoza from Descartes. From *Def. 4* Spinoza directly derives *Prop. 9*, which states that «the more reality a thing has, the more attributes it has»¹¹⁹ and from *Def. 3* and *Def. 4* he deduces *Prop. 10*, according to which «Each attribute of one substance must be conceived through itself»¹²⁰. Within these two propositions and the definitions on which they stand, we find synthesized the problem of *difference* concerning *infinity*. It is clear from *Def. 4* that the *attribute* is *how* a *substance* is conceived in its existence and how the attribute is only found in association with a *substance* – not as a quality attached to a *thing* but as «constituting its essence». Making *substance* conceivable in its *existence* and constituting its *essence* means that *attributes* are not optional properties of a *substance*; they *ontologically* belong to it, *i.e.* they are the operational actualization of a *substance*. There cannot be any expression of a *substance* if not through one of its *attributes*. *Extension* and *thought* are the *attributes* that are known to us; they constitute the way we experience *substance*. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to *think substance* itself, which is characterized as *absolutely infinite being*, as, for instance, an *infinitely extended* entity, for that would amount to a determination, thus to a limitation, which blatantly contradicts its *absolutely infinite being*. As a matter of fact, attempting to *think substance* under some sort of determination implies treating it as a finite object. In Spinoza's case we are not trying to determine *substance*, we are attempting to *think* it from within the determinations of reality, which are its very own finite determinations expressed through its *attributes*. As Deleuze points out: «Attributes

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 221.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

are like points of view on substance; but in the absolute limit these points of view are no longer external, and substance contains within itself the infinity of its points of view upon itself»¹²¹. If these «points of view», which are nothing like predicates or qualities, are to be conceived as constituting the *essence* of *substance*, there is no real distinction between *substance* and *attributes* as in *each attribute* we find the whole of *substance* understood either as *thought* or *extension*, for instance. Nadler is correct only to an extent when he affirms the following: «The attributes are indeed elements making up the absolutely infinite substance but none can be removed or separated from the totality that is substance itself, not even in principle. Each attribute is in itself and conceived through itself»¹²². Even though Nadler captures the indissoluble link between *attributes* and *substance*, he still sees them as elements of a whole and thus fails to see that *each attribute* expresses *substance* as a whole *in its own way*: whenever we conceive of *substance* as *extension* we conceive the *totality* of *substance* as extended and the same goes for *thought*: the relationship is not one of *whole* vs. *parts* but between types of *infinity*. It is compelling, then, that *attributes* themselves should be *infinite*, as they are identical with *substance* and express it in their own *way*, without being constrained by any other *attribute*. The only way we can conceive or represent *substance*, then, is through an *attribute*. Nevertheless, we cannot represent it or conceive it as an *infinitely extended entity* or as an omnicomprehensive *intellect* when we think of it in its *absolute infinity*. In that case it will not be *absolute* but determined in *one way*, although in both cases we are trying to conceive the same “thing”. If we are not to fall into error or confusion, then, we have to make the effort to think such *infinities* in a different manner. The *absolute infinite* that characterizes *substance* is one that is not extended either in matter or thought. It is indifferent to measurement, analysis and division and can therefore be nothing but an *intensive infinite*. This is a notion we encountered previously in Bruno and one that will be gradually clarified in the course of our study of Spinoza.

¹²¹ G. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, p. 22.

¹²² S. Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics. An Introduction*, pp. 69-70.

The distinction mentioned above allows us to move to the notion of *infinite attributes*. Spinoza, in a manner that resembles Bruno's approach, bends traditional concepts. In this case, as Carlo Sini rightly points out¹²³, seeing the *attributes* as *infinite* just because they belong to an *infinite substance* is a rather traditional Neoplatonic claim. Such a claim would imagine the *infinite substance* on one side and its *attributes* as some kind of hypostases – a fault that we encountered in Nadler too. Says Sini: «I have said two things: the first is more banal, the second is more profound. To substance it is indifferent how many attributes there are; as a matter of fact, the problem does not lie there; attributes cannot be quantified, they are unlimitable, they are not 1+1+1+1+n. But then I said another thing within this: to substance attribute is in-different. There is no difference between attributes for substance. It is the attributes that make the difference, whereas to substance it does not matter to be thought or extended, it is indifferent. From the point of view of substance, three attributes are not more than two, three hundred more than two hundred, three thousand more than two thousand»¹²⁴. Sini is claiming that, from the standpoint of *substance*, it makes no sense to investigate whether there are *attributes* in addition to *extension* and *thought*¹²⁵ and, if so, what they are. Even Nadler

¹²³ See C. Sini, *Archivio Spinoza. La verità e la vita*, Ghibli, Milano 2005, p. 209: «[...] if the substance is infinite, then it cannot but have infinite attributes because if the cause is infinite, then the effect is infinite. This way, though, we are thinking like Bruno, thus neoplatonically». My translation from the Italian: «[...] se la sostanza è infinita, non può che avere infiniti attributi, perché se infinita è la causa, infinito è l'effetto. Così però si ragiona alla Bruno, cioè neoplatonicamente».

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 212. My translation from the Italian: «Ho detto due cose: la prima più banale, la seconda più profonda. Alla sostanza è indifferente quanti siano gli attributi; infatti non è lì il problema; gli attributi non si possono quantificare, sono indelimitabili, non sono 1+1+1+1+n. Ma poi ho detto un'altra cosa dentro questa: alla sostanza l'attributo è in-differente. Non c'è differenza, per la sostanza, tra gli attributi. Sono gli attributi che fanno differenza, mentre alla sostanza non interessa esser pensata, o esser estesa, è indifferente. Dal punto di vista della sostanza tre attributi non sono più di due, trecento di duecento, tremila di duemila».

¹²⁵ Commentators like Bennet do not seem willing to undertake a similar thinking effort. Bennet prefers to act as an investigator in order to discover if somewhere in Spinoza's works there are any traces of what he really meant, only to verify that there are not any. He dismisses the problem as follows, drawing strategic and psychological implications that have little to do with philosophy: «The situation regarding the proposition that there are more than two attributes is this: Spinoza was under no pressure to assert it, nothing in the *Ethics* unquestionably means it, none of the work's structures reflects it, and if it were added to the *Ethics* and fully developed it would create an

imagines attributes as distinct elements, as if they were somehow “numerable things”, however inseparable from *substance*. The difference is more subtle: when I understand the colour red by looking at something red and when I understand the same experience of the colour red by defining it as some particular refraction of light, I am understanding the same thing in both cases, once under the attribute of *extension*, once under the attribute of *thought*. This happens because I am understanding a *mode* of *substance* through two of its attributes, but I am understanding the same *thing*. Such a *thing* does not reside anywhere else than exactly where and how I am experiencing it, the *substance* of which the colour red is a modification is not somewhere else where we can find a *colour red-in-itself*, some sort of *noumenon*, yet *ante litteram*. That is how a certain kind of metaphysics – that which Heidegger identifies with Metaphysics – reifies and makes *substance* transcendent. For Spinoza nothing but *attributes* can constitute the *essence* of *substance*, whose only difference from *substance* is the very event of their *difference* amongst one another. If we keep on reasoning *extensive* [Latin for *extensively*], we shall surely keep on seeing such *difference* as numerical but then we would be compelled to see *attributes* as numerically distinct, which they are not, not even in principle – as Nadler rightly admits. By seeing attributes as numerical we would fall back right into the hands of Descartes and have to admit that each corresponds to a different *substance* and get trapped into an irredeemable dualism. If we think

impossible problem for Spinoza’s epistemology. Those are four reasons for reading the *Ethics* as consistent with attribute dualism. Should we read it as entailing dualism? The reasons do not work as well in support of that, though the fourth is still powerful: the difficulty of explaining our ignorance of further attributes is a positive reason for denying that there are any. Spinoza could have argued for dualism like this: “The universe must exist in every possible basic way, of which the only two we know about are thought and extension. My views about what we are, and about what knowledge is, make it seem impossible that there should be attributes which we do not know. So, probably, thought and extension are the only possible basic ways of being, though I cannot see why this should be so and cannot make it look self-evident”. The modesty and caution of that were foreign to Spinoza’s temperament, however. He said nothing like it and probably thought nothing like it. I have no idea what Spinoza really thought about how many attributes there are. My central claim is not about his mind but about the text. It is that if he took “infinite attributes” to imply “more than two attributes”, then that extra implication is negligible because in the *Ethics* it is idle». From J. Bennet, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, Hackett, Indianapolis 1984, pp. 78-79.

intensive [Latin for *intensively*] as we already did in the case of Bruno, the problem vanishes because, from the perspective of the *absolute infinite*, there is no standard against which we can numerate *attributes*, so one is not less than three, which is no more than two and vice-versa. And that is how Jonathan Bennet's effort becomes rather meaningless¹²⁶.

We are starting to understand that the issue of *difference* is intimately intertwined with that of *infinity* and with the fact that *mathematics* is intended, as Bruno wished and practised, not as the pure and abstract language of nature but as subordinate to the philosophical practice: Bruno and Spinoza, respectively before and after the official rise of *modernity*, had already captured its major shortcoming. Let us then explore this aspect further and jump for a moment to Part II of the *Ethics*, to the *Scholium* of *Prop. 45* – «every idea of any body or particular thing existing in actuality necessarily involves the eternal and infinite essence of God»¹²⁷:

Here by existence I do not mean duration, that is, existence insofar as it is considered in the abstract as a kind of quantity. I am speaking of the very nature of existence, which is attributed to particular things because they follow in infinite numbers in infinite ways from the necessity of God's nature (Pr. 16, I). I am speaking, I repeat, of the very existence of particular things insofar as they are in God. For although each particular thing is determined by another particular thing to exist in a certain manner, the force by which each perseveres in existing follows from the eternal necessity of God's nature. See Cor. Pr. 24, I.¹²⁸

The proof of this proposition is based on the fact that an idea is necessarily understood through an *attribute*, which constitutes the eternal and infinite essence of God, according to *Def. 6*. What is really interesting here, though, is the confirmation of our distinction between an *infinite* understood *intensive* as opposed to *extensive*. Spinoza's causal chains are not to be reduced to mechanical links between determined objects; that is only a numerical, thus *modal* and not real, understanding of them. As Heidegger would have it, we would simply skip over the thing by

¹²⁶ See note above.

¹²⁷ B. Spinoza, "Ethics", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 270.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 270-271.

projecting mathematics onto it. Just as in Bruno, duration here does not make any sense if matched with *infinity*, as one minute or one century are *indifferent* to eternity: one minute or one century are the abstractions we use in order to represent inter-modal time, but *modes*, although they *involve* the eternal and infinite essence of God – and in there lies their necessity – are constituted by an *essence* that does not entail *existence*. Thus *duration* cannot tell us anything about existence as such; *duration*, as we said, is only a numerical abstraction. As Deleuze would have it: «numerical distinction can never distinguish substances, but only modes that involve the same attribute. For number expresses in its own way the character of existing modes: the composite nature of their parts, their limitation by other things of the same nature, their determination from outside themselves. Number thus goes on *ad infinitum*. But the question is, can it ever reach infinity itself? Or, as Spinoza puts it: even in the case of modes, is it from the multitude of parts that we infer their infinity?»¹²⁹. Here Deleuze re-proposes the same argument we encountered in Bruno: it does not make any sense to imagine an infinite extension as *divided* up into an infinite number of finite extensions as that would lead to the absurdity that an infinity of inches is somehow larger than an infinity of feet¹³⁰. Again, this distorted perspective is that of the of the mathematician, who claims to be able to measure infinity by dividing it up, a perspective that Bruno had fought since he was inspired by Mordente’s compass. The perspective of the philosopher looks farther than mathematics and does not stop at the mere projection of his calculations onto nature: the *infinite* is not divisible

¹²⁹ G. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, p. 33.

¹³⁰ Rather explicit in Spinoza in Prop. 13, I «*Absolutely infinite substance is indivisible. Proof* If it were divisible, the parts in which it would be divided will either retain the nature of absolutely infinite substance, or not. In the first case, there would therefore be several substances of the same nature, which is absurd (Pr. 5). In the second case, absolutely infinite substance can cease to be, which is also absurd (Pr. 11).

Corollary From this follows that no substance, and consequently no corporeal substance, insofar as it is substance, is divisible.

Scholium The indivisibility of substance can be more easily understood merely from the fact that the nature of substance can only be conceived as infinite, and that a part of substance can mean only finite substance, which involves an obvious contradiction (Pr. 8)» From B. Spinoza, “Ethics”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 224.

because, however you divide it, its finite parts cannot be related or counted, they lose consistency; the so-called parts of the *infinite extension*, for instance, cannot be considered as *modes of extension* because *modes*, as we saw above, cannot find their origin in the *division* of the *attribute* and the same reasoning goes for *eternity* and *duration*. Whenever we speak from the perspective of *infinity intensive* [to be read in Latin], then, and not *extensive* [to be read in Latin] – which is merely numerical and therefore abstract – we are speaking from the point of view of *substance*, that is what is most real, *i.e.* what is real, thus numerical distinction cannot be a *real* distinction. Thus, Deleuze is right in concluding: «Numerical distinction is never real; then conversely, real distinction is never numerical. Spinoza’s argument now becomes: attributes are really distinct; but real distinction is never numerical; so there is only one substance for all attributes»¹³¹.

We have mentioned several times the word *reality* and we have seen it defined in several manners that lead us towards *substance* but we have not yet thought it thoroughly. Therefore, we shall now perform a new jump back to *Ethics, Part I*, to the very first proposition of Spinoza’s masterpiece:

Substance is by nature prior to its affections.

Proof This is evident from Defs. 3 and 5.¹³²

Having briefly explored Spinoza’s attitude towards *duration*, we should be able to do away with any gross misinterpretation of *Proposition 1*. It is obvious that Spinoza does not mean to give a temporal priority to *substance* when referring to its *affections*, *i.e.* the *modes*, because that would require the application of inter-modal measurement criteria – duration – that do not belong to *substance*, *intensively understood*. We are talking about an *ontological* priority here, which makes the existence of *substance* coincide with its essence, which amounts exactly to saying that *substance* is *causa sui*. If we do away with our reifying, modern and dualistic

¹³¹ G. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, p. 34.

¹³² B. Spinoza, “Ethics”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 218.

attitude, we shall be able to see that such priority is not given because *substance* comes first by causing itself and then somehow generates its *modes* through the *attributes*. From our perspective as humans, the perspective of *modes* of *substance*, it could appear that *modes* are somehow temporally and physically transient: *modes* live, die, decompose, they are forgotten and remembered. That is correct, but it would be mistaken to say that *modes* are secondary with respect to *substance* simply because they pass away: we would be, once more, talking of *substance* in modal terms, in terms of *duration*, for instance. What makes *modes* ontologically secondary is simply the fact that their *essence* does not entail *existence*, which constitutes the priority of *substance*: *modes* are limited because they are always the effect of a cause and the cause of an effect; they do not subsist on their own. In our *modal* world we feel such a situation to be explicated as a characteristic contingency of the *modes* and their historical life, which allows us to order facts, objects and people historically, which means measuring and ordering them according to numerical distinctions that, we saw, are not *real*. Now we understand even better what Bruno's perspective on mathematics and the *minimum* was: his mathematics based on *numeration* and not on *calculation* played exactly on the awareness that *division* is not real and he combined it with an intuitive and synthetic mathematical procedure that does not provide a physical or objective *reality* to *atoms* or *monads* but an ordering of reality that is constantly confronted with the necessity of infinity *intensive*. That is why Bruno's *minimum* is not understood through dimension. In the following passage Deleuze could easily be talking of Bruno when he describes the dynamics of that "plane of immanence" that is Spinoza's *substance*: «a plane of immanence has no supplementary dimension: the process of composition must be apprehended for itself, through that which it gives, in that which it gives. It is a plan of composition, not a plan of organization or development [...]. There is no longer a form, but only relations of velocity between infinitesimal particles of an unformed material. There is no longer a subject, but only individuating affective states of an anonymous force»¹³³.

¹³³ G. Deleuze, *Spinoza. Practical Philosophy*, p. 128.

From the perspective of *substance*, these relations of composition, whatever attribute they are conceived through, are *affections* understood under a point of view of necessity – they have always been there – but *contingent* from a modal point of view, thus their reality is not *substantial*. Valerio draws his conclusion all the way to Heidegger and shows, by quoting him, the nearness of Spinoza’s *substance* to Heidegger’s *Being* through the notion of *ontological priority*: «This “even more initial sense” of Being, which we have called ‘ontological priority’, expresses the anarchy of Being itself with regards to the being [*ens*]; as a matter of fact, as much as it is in its power, it does not refer to a different ‘principle’ that is not *its own* truth. Resting in itself, without the need of a further reference “Being as Being is the *event* [*Ereignis*] – comments Heidegger in a note to the *Nachwort* – that precedes difference and is therefore *without* the being [*ens*]”»¹³⁴. *Being* that is *without being* corresponds to that retention that we encountered in Heidegger’s *mnemonic* understanding of thinking with relation to *Being*. Nevertheless, as *memory* retains and keeps in safety, it is only in virtue of the fact that it *gives*. *Being* without *beings* is the expression of an *intensive* point of view that excludes an understanding based on determination, which is how *beings* can be understood in their *ontic* dimension. On the other hand, in reality such retention never stops *giving*, it never stops *existing* in its determinate dimension. One thought does not hold without the other.

Finally, I believe we should qualify our affirmation that the *reality* of *modes*, understood in themselves, is not *substantial*; it is an implication that, at Spinoza’s time, could have cost a life even in the Netherlands, the most liberal country of Europe at the time. The facts that the mild Spinoza is one of the most widely cursed and feared philosophers of all times and that the *Ethics* was published posthumously

¹³⁴ F. Valerio, “Heidegger, Spinoza e il «problema della soggettività»”, in G. Semerari, *Confronti con Heidegger*, pp. 234-235. My translation from the Italian: «Questo “senso ancor più iniziale” dell’Essere, che noi abbiamo chiamato ‘priorità ontologica’, dice l’an-archia dell’Essere stesso rispetto all’ente; esso, infatti, per quanto è in suo potere, non rinvia ad un ‘principio’ altro che non sia la *propria* verità. Riposando in se stesso, senza il bisogno dell’ulteriorità del riferimento, l’”Essere in quanto Essere è l’evento – commenta una nota manoscritta di Heidegger al *Nachwort* – che precede la differenza, e perciò è senza ente”».

definitely give some weight to our statement. There is more to it, nevertheless, so we should make one last effort to *think* this affirmation in all of its implications. Such an effort consists in *thinking difference*, while we are obliged to remain within our *modal* standpoint, without losing the other perspective, which is the one of *substance*. Once more, we are faced with the dual thought. In everyday life we are used to deal with pens, trees, chairs, my sister and the President of the Republic and nobody, with the exception of Descartes haunted by the evil demon, would doubt that they are actual and real. Nevertheless, following Spinoza, we have just affirmed that *modes* do not possess a *substantial reality* in themselves. The fact that the *essence* of a *mode* does not entail *existence*, which is thereby *not necessary*, should be made more intelligible in its practical consequences. The fact that I cannot *really* distinguish the *modes* from one another but I can only *numerically* distinguish them implies the conclusion that a pen is not *really* distinguished from a book or a chair if not quantitatively *i.e. extensively*. The very feature of being closed up into a *modal* standpoint – without the effort of *thinking* the perspective of *substance* – amounts, on the other hand, to treating *numerical* distinctions as *real*: under this univocal perspective the *reality* of a pen, of a book, of a chair, of a person even, is uniquely derived from *quantitative*, thus abstract, features: weight, shape, colour, use and so forth. Yet, such *extensive* and *quantitative* features are only generated *relationally*, thus they cannot be held responsible for the *reality* of a *mode*, which can only be accounted for if we consider the point of view of *substance*, which does not depend on anything *different* from it in order to acquire *reality*. The everyday attitude of dealing with *objects* with a sort of common sense realism, as if they were prototypes of reality (e.g. “a book is just a book and a chair is just a chair”) is strongly undermined by the Spinozist view. When we dealt with Bruno’s *living infinite Matter* we saw something very similar: *difference*, understood merely *extensively* and from a bodily point of view, was nothing but the *configuration* of the *ens* that, if understood *intensively*, captures the variety and *vicissitude* of the *living infinite matter* by denying the existence of fixed and particular natures. Finally, then, what does it mean

to *think* that the keyboard I am using in this moment cannot count on itself in order to be *real*? It means that it cannot be *really distinguished*, and that is why it is necessarily existent in the *in-difference* of *substance*. It means that the keyboard is only the tip of the iceberg, figuratively. The keyboard is inscribed in the practice of writing, in the industrial scheme within which it was conceived and produced and in the materials used to build it, in the IT culture and in the alphabetical Western tradition, in its fancy design and in its weight. All such relations are themselves tips of icebergs: the keyboard, just like the pen, is not really distinguished because it originates from the ἀλήθεια, the play of unconcealment through which *Being* conceals while revealing itself. In Spinozist terms we would merely define them as *affections of the substance*. Humans are no exception. On the other hand, the modern *subject* is the outcome of *modernity* arbitrarily granting this kind of *reality* to what should be understood as a *mode*, while making it the standard of the reality of *nature*, which is turned into a determinate agglomerate of *objects*. What we have so far addressed is the unsaid of the history of metaphysics, which in Heidegger remains constantly implicit for it does not find an actual expression as, on the other hand, occurs in Bruno and Spinoza. Mignini provides a particularly effective image of the two authors' role within the history of philosophy: «Under the ontological profile, the *Ethics* can be considered as the most rigorous philosophical document in the modern age of the historical doctrine of the indeterminate principle. Such a doctrine can be compared to a Carsic river, which, after having irrigated and seeded periods and regions of the ancient culture, has sunk for a long time under the surface only to appear now and then and sink again until its emergence in the modern age with the *indifferent* One of Bruno and in Spinoza's Substance. The totality of the attributes constituting the essence of substance can be considered as simultaneous and identical to its unitary absolute existence only if substance, considered in itself as absolute principle, necessary and immanent to its own determinations, is considered as an active and neutral infinite power, indifferent to any essential determination»¹³⁵. Bruno

¹³⁵ F. Mignini, *L'Etica di Spinoza. Introduzione alla lettura*, Carocci, Roma 2009, p. 193. My

and Spinoza are the witnesses of an *origin* that is *intensive*, *i.e.* beyond determination and a matter for philosophy. The censorship of the *subject* obstructs any access because it can only grasp *difference* as mere determination and not in relation to *indifference*. As a matter of fact, it is only in virtue of this that *modes* can be understood as *affections of the substance*, whether they are a *man*, a rat or a stone.

translation from the Italian: «Sotto il profilo ontologico, l'*Etica* può essere considerata come il più rigoroso documento filosofico, nell'età moderna, della dottrina storica del principio indeterminato. Tale dottrina può essere paragonata a un fiume carsico, il quale, dopo aver bagnato e fecondato periodi e regioni della cultura antica, si è a lungo inabissato sotto la superficie per apparire solo a tratti e di nuovo inabissare, fino al suo emergere sicuro in età moderna nell'Uno *indifferente* di Bruno e nella Sostanza di Spinoza. La totalità degli attributi costituenti l'essenza della sostanza può essere considerata come simultanea e identica alla sua unitaria esistenza assoluta solo in quanto la sostanza, considerata in sé come principio assoluto, , necessario e immanente delle proprie determinazioni, venga assunta come una potenza attiva infinita e neutra, indifferente a ogni determinazione essenziale».

PART II

Gnosiology

Chapter IV – Subjectless/Objectless Knowing

Section 1 – Truth as Openness

The modern *subject* obliterates the problem of *Being* by turning philosophical practice into *epistemology*. We saw that in Bruno and Spinoza it was not *method* which dictated the development of their *ontology*: by focusing on *mathematics*, it was possible to see how reality is known, although not by being subordinated to *method*. Heidegger does not develop a theory of knowledge in its own right, as his primary concern is to develop a radical *ontology*. This fact does not make the problem of knowledge irrelevant or marginal in his work; rather, it brings it to another level. *Knowledge* itself, then, will need to acquire a new and broader meaning outside the *subject/object* dualism and the analysis of some of Heidegger's texts will show how it is possible to talk of a *gnosiology* in Heidegger, even though he does not use this term himself. As a starting point I shall consider Heidegger's speech as a rector (*Rektoratsrede*), known as *The Self-Assertion of the German University*. The philosophical relevance of this text has been highly disputed. The reason why this 1933 speech gave rise to many controversies and opposing interpretations has to be found in the context in which it took place, the rise of National Socialism in Germany and Heidegger's brief adhesion to it. Nevertheless I am not going to focus on the immediate political aspect of the speech, as what I am really interested in is Heidegger's concern for the university as an institution, an inescapable element of his philosophical research and the place where *knowledge* as such is transmitted, apprehended or called into question. It is not a coincidence that in many of his lectures Heidegger used to start by interrogating himself and the student body on what they were actually doing when they started their activity united in the *Gefolgschaft*, the «following» of those who have the privilege of gathering around a leader who is himself guided by a spiritual mission. The *Gefolgschaft* finds its origin in the history of the ancient barbarian populations of Germany, as narrated by

Tacitus, and it constitutes part of the essence of Germany and of its university, an essence that is historical and needs to be asserted. Whilst it is not surprising that some of the Nazi auditors easily misread Heidegger's words in favour of much coarser ideals, it is interesting to note Heidegger's commitment to the university as the home of *science*. As a matter of fact, it should not be forgotten that for Heidegger *science* «is philosophy, whether it knows and wills it – or not»¹³⁶.

In order to analyse the sense in which Heidegger intends *science*, it is useful to start from a different, and somehow broader, concept, that of *knowing*:

Among the Greeks an old story went around that Prometheus had been the first philosopher. Aeschylus has this Prometheus utter a saying that expresses the essence of knowing.

τέχνη δ'ανάγκης ασθενεστερα μακρῶ

“Knowing, however, is far weaker than necessity”. This is to say: all knowing about things has always been delivered up to overpowering fate and fails before it.¹³⁷

What Heidegger is trying to show by appealing to the Greeks is that we have forgotten the essence of *knowing* and therefore the essence of *science*; he translates τέχνη as *knowing* in order to stress the fundamental difference between the ancient Greek conception of knowledge, which was not of a theoretical type and therefore it was not worthy of contemplation and admiration as such, but as «the power that hones and embraces *Dasein* in its entirety»¹³⁸. It seems, then, that there is a totality in the essence of *knowing* that does not appear in the modern way of approaching knowledge, which seems to conceive science as a progressive form of praxis that tries to add up more and more material; for the Greeks knowledge expresses the link between the inside and the outside, *i.e.* the *being-there* that is neither the contemplating subject nor the inanimate object and that is subordinated to the power

¹³⁶ M. Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University”, in *Philosophical and Political Writings*, edited by M. Stassen, Continuum, New York 2003, p. 4.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

of fate, in a perfectly *tragic* fashion, in other words, *Dasein*. Nevertheless, we are faced with a dilemma: if it is true that the Greeks could initiate Philosophy as we know it because of the fundamental relationship between knowledge and fate, it is also true that Philosophy as such has led to the disappearance of this totality in favour of a science that has turned into something else. Τέχνη is no longer a global way of knowing but has turned into the practical branch of theoretical knowing (ἐπιστήμη), namely, *technology*. Already in Plato and Aristotle, respectively in the *Republic* and in *De Anima*, the ἐπιστήμη appears to be characterized as an intellectual and universal form of knowledge, deriving from the first principle, respectively the ἰδέα and the οὐσία. In Chapter I we gave an account of the Platonic transition from a *mnemonic* tension of *Being* to an understanding of *Being* as *presence*. The metaphysics of presence, *i.e.* the metaphysics of the *ens*, following Heidegger, lays the basis for the systematic reduction of Philosophy (as Metaphysics) to the calculation, prediction and control of *beings*, namely modern science, which resolves itself into τέχνη, in a fashion that renders the question of Being, so dear to Heidegger, unnecessary¹³⁹. One of Heidegger’s great merits, I think, has been to let us see that the problems of philosophy are not of an intellectual nature, *i.e.* the question of Being is not an intellectual question but the means philosophy uses in order to address them

¹³⁹ In the *Contributions to Philosophy* Heidegger contextualizes this cognitive situation through the word “machination”, *i.e.* “a manner of the essential sway of being”, which “is the early and still long hidden showing of what is precisely *not* ownmost to the beingness of beings”. Machination is “early” precisely because it finds its roots in ancient Metaphysics and Heidegger provides a rather explicit schema that exemplifies such a derivation:

“οὐσία (τέχνη – ποίησις – ἰδέα)

constant presence

ens creatum

nature

history

causality and objectness

re-presentedness

lived-experience”.

See M. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* [1989], Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1999, pp. 88-90.

are intellectual; it is not surprising, then, that metaphysics has been the core of philosophy for centuries and that it has led to the supremacy of modern science, which has obliterated *thinking*. As Heidegger himself makes clear in *What is called Thinking?*:

Thinking – more precisely, the attempt and the duty to think – is now approaching an era when the high demands which traditional thinking believed it was meeting, and pretended it had to meet, become untenable. The way of the question “What is called Thinking?” lies even now in the shadow of this weakness. The weakness can be described in four statements: 1. Thinking does not bring knowledge as do the sciences. 2. Thinking does not produce usable practical wisdom. 3. Thinking solves no cosmic riddles. 4. Thinking does not endow us directly with the power to act.¹⁴⁰

If we are to extract a theory of knowledge from Heidegger, we cannot look to a sort of *epistemology*, a term which is now unequivocally used to indicate the philosophy of science, mainly within the analytic philosophical tradition. We have to understand *knowledge* through the practice of *thinking*, which means abandoning the scientific temptation of seeing nature as *objective*.

Following Heidegger, then, the problem of knowledge cannot even be considered as properly philosophical unless it regains the characteristics of totality found in the Greek tragic tradition; yet Heidegger is perfectly aware that it is impossible to ignore what has happened between us moderns and the Greeks and he is always very careful to avoid giving any judgement of value, even if it is about technology. The fact that Being has delivered itself as *technology* is itself part of the necessity, the fate to which knowing is subordinated. Being itself has delivered itself as *technology*, thus hiding behind its concealment and hiding the very fact of its own concealment, therefore making the question of Being useless and forgotten. I would like to be faithful to Heidegger and, at the same time, to pull myself out of his paths of thought, in order to get him to speak to a different tradition, and that is why, despite everything that has been said, I would still like to give a name to the problem of knowledge in Heidegger: *gnosiology*. *Gnosiology*, if compared to *epistemology*,

¹⁴⁰ M. Heidegger, *What is called Thinking?*, p. 159.

has a stronger ontological connotation, as it generally indicates a theory of knowledge that derives from the actual *being* of *beings* and not from the manner in which *beings* are grasped; the Greek word γνώσις, as a matter of fact, differs from ἐπιστήμη as it indicates a non-theoretical knowledge but an intuitive, and sometimes mystical, experience, thus implying an *ethical* level, *i.e.* an actual involvement of the *knower* with the *known* as opposed to a subject/object dichotomy. In the case of Bruno and Spinoza, who understand *man* as qualitatively in-different towards the rest of *nature*, the notion of *gnosiology* does not incur any difficulty. In the case of Heidegger, on the other hand, it is not enough to rule out *epistemology* in order to speak of a *gnosiology*, although I think that there is indeed a concept that brings Heidegger closer to Bruno and Spinoza and that is the one of *Lichtung*, as it is found in the *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*. We wish to show how close his notion of *Lichtung* [clearing] is to a tradition that, I think, has a lot more in common with Heidegger than it is generally believed. It is important to stress that we are not advocating a mystical interpretation of Heidegger's thought, although that is the risk run by any interpretation claiming to be alternative to *modernity*. The Philosophy of the Renaissance, in particular that of Bruno, has been in many ways considered not properly modern, due to its colourful, sometimes obscure, and strongly allegorical language or because it has been seen as a strong political stance against the religious oppression of the time but it is my opinion that neither of these analyses properly exhausts its value. After all, Heidegger is not immune from allegations of mysticism and it would not be hard to compare the two philosophers on that ground; Spinoza's *third kind of knowledge* is itself a very slippery ground between Philosophy and mysticism but I shall refrain from adopting such interpretations in order to keep the discourse on a solid philosophical track.

The notion of *Lichtung* is inserted in the Heideggerian quest for originary truth, as expounded in the *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, a work published posthumously, composed not long after the suspension of *Sein und Zeit*. Such notion carries the task of making explicit, and thus overcoming, some of those aspects that

made it impossible for Heidegger, not to pursue his ontological project, but to pursue it from such an anthropocentric point of view as that of *Da-sein* and through a language too highly compromised with metaphysics and therefore with the «Abandonment of the Question of Being». Heidegger's vocabulary enforces upon *thinking* a powerful twist aimed at rescuing *thinking* from the now sterile theoretical path of metaphysics; the terms, and sometimes images, he uses have got a sensuous and *ethical* dimension, in the sense that they should not only be thought but practised and experienced: as was noted while talking about the *Rektoratsrede*, Philosophy as ontology is not a merely intellectual issue. Thus we shall address the notion of *Lichtung*, which is generally translated into English as «clearing» but which, as happens with many Heideggerian terms, needs to be qualified in depth. *Lichtung* has a very specific meaning as *clearing* but not related to *Licht*, *i.e.* light, which theoretically excludes possible analogies with any “philosophy of light”. Heidegger gives an account of the etymology of *Lichtung* revealing that, historically and linguistically, its meaning is borrowed from the French word *clairière*, which is the open and free space left in the midst of a wood or a forest when the trees thin out. The actual word *Lichtung*, in fact, is composed of the archaic German words *Waldung* (wood) and *Feldung* (field), and the *Waldlichtung* is precisely the open space in the wood; furthermore *Lichten*, as a verb, means to “thin out”. Nevertheless, even though the etymology does not involve the concept of “light” as such, it would be too easy to dismiss the relation of *clearing* to “light” because, if we move onto another level, we can observe that the *Lichtung*, the *clearing* in the wood, allows light to get through and enlighten the *clearing* itself. If we wish to make a phenomenological observation, we cannot ignore that a *clearing* clears the way to something else; so we cannot exclude *tout court* the possibility of *light*, which would need to be qualified as well on its own. For now it will be enough to notice that the *clearing* provides the possibility of a double movement of retirement and advancement, a step back and a step forwards practised at once, which is the same

movement Heidegger attributes to *memory*. The *Lichtung* is not and cannot be a univocal notion, as we can tell from Heidegger's own words:

If truth here means *clearing* [Lichtung] of be-ing as openness of the midst of beings, then one cannot even enquire into the truth of this truth unless one means the *correctness* of the projecting-open – but that misses in manifold ways what is essential. For, on the one hand, one cannot inquire into the “correctness” of projecting-open at all – and certainly not into the correctness of *that* projecting-open through which on the whole the clearing is grounded. On the other hand, however, “correctness” is a “type” of truth that as its consequence *lags* behind the originary essential sway and therefore already does not suffice for grasping originary truth.¹⁴¹

Here «correctness» is intended as referring to that «manner of the essential sway of be-ing» Heidegger calls «Machination», which is incompatible and almost antithetical to the *Lichtung*: «correctness» refers to what is objectively measurable and predictable, which provides an immediately usable kind of truth that erases any need for the undetermined and the concealed and thus any need for a *clearing*. We are talking of a type of *measuring* that radically differs from that theorized by Bruno. Whereas Heidegger's critique of *correctness* attacks the modern scientific attitude, which seems to assume the measurability of an objectified nature, we saw that Bruno introduces a concept of *measuring* that is not based on *calculation* but on *relation*. Both ways imply a sort of understanding of nature but the former covers up any access to *Being*. As a matter of fact, Heidegger is deliberately ambiguous here, as «correctness» is nevertheless a kind of truth, a way in which *Being* is delivered to us, but one that, at the same time, contributes to seal its concealment to the point of its abandonment. Whenever τέχνη, daughter and active instrument of the ἐπιστήμη, is identified with the truth, then not only does the *openness*, which nonetheless opens up such truth, remain concealed but also the problem of its *unconcealment* is forgotten.

The *clearing* as openness of the originary truth of *Being* is therefore not an *object* that needs to be uncovered, which is a prerogative of the realm of Machination, the realm where *knowledge* measures, predicts and subsequently produces. It is hard

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

not to notice that the need for *unconcealment*, expressed by Heidegger, springs from the realm of Machination itself, which has supposedly forgotten and abandoned *Being* as such; «correctness» is indeed related to *Lichtung*, to the extent that through it the *clearing* is shut. Such *forgetting* re-affirms what Heidegger claims in *What is called thinking?* – which we saw in Chapter I – that *thinking is in need of memory*. The *Lichtung*, as a matter of fact, is an *openness* that keeps in safety, that shelters what is to be given or revealed and that is the reason why it acquires the feature of *hesitation*, which Heidegger describes in the *Contributions*. The *clearing* is the theatre, the stage of the *openness* where *truth* is not revealed in the form of *ground as presence* but through a *hesitating self-refusing*. Heidegger calls this *ab-ground*, which replicates the *mnemonic* dynamic of retention and delivery:

Ab-ground is the hesitating refusal of ground. In refusal, originary emptiness opens, originary *clearing* occurs; but the clearing is at the same time such that the hesitating manifests in it. Ab-ground is the primarily essential [*erstwesentliche*] *sheltering that lights up*, is the essential sway of truth.¹⁴²

What Machination does is forgetting and obliterating the sheltering of this *openness*, thus occupying the entire stage as if *ground* showed itself as *presence*. *Being* does not stop delivering itself through its own *concealment* – even when it delivers itself as *metaphysics* – but the game of *Being* finds no more *shelter* for it is forgotten. *Memory* itself is obliterated because what is to be kept safe and sheltered gets covered up. Krell, reporting an encounter with Heidegger himself, clarifies this point: «Sheltering has to do with *hüten* and *schonen*, safeguarding and protecting the mystery of *Being*'s self-concealment. For Heidegger such sheltering is the very essence of mortal dwelling. He was therefore careful to warn me not to allow the distinction between concealment (of *Being*) and shelter (of the mystery) to be conflated»¹⁴³. *Man*'s task is one of sheltering and protecting, which amounts to going back to a notion of *knowing*

¹⁴² M. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, p. 265.

¹⁴³ D. Farrell Krell, *Intimations of Mortality. Time, Truth and Finitude in Heidegger's Thinking of Being* [1986], Penn State University Press, University Park 1991, p. 92.

as *remembering*. The movement is opposite if we compare it to what happened with Plato, as we described it in Chapter I, which saw truth being progressively shifted from *memory* to *correspondence*: the tension in Plato is finally resolved in favour of the latter. *Memory* is that *thinking* which uncovers what is covered up and shelters it, meaning that it guarantees the *unconcealment* game through retention. If *sheltering* is the *essence of mortal dwelling*, then *man* stands in the *openness* whether he wants to or not, as Krell notes: «Man alone enjoys the open, oblivious of at least one of his feet, the one planted firmly on the far side of the gap»¹⁴⁴. There is no particular course of action *man* is supposed to take – we saw that *thinking* is not prescriptive – but a recalling of *man*'s position within the *openness*:

Man only *inhabits* the keeping of what gives him food for thought – he does not create the keeping. Only that which keeps safely can preserve – preserve what is to be thought. The keeping preserves by giving harbour, and also protection from danger. And from what does the keeping preserve what is to be thought? From oblivion.¹⁴⁵

The reason I earlier emphasized the Aeschylean dictum from the *Rektorsrede* is that it can help us understand how the global point of view of the Greeks, as *origin*, is still present and yet closed up: as was said earlier, it is not possible, or useful, to repeat the experience of the Greeks as such but, on the other hand, it is possible to overcome the ambiguity by accepting «correctness» and Machination as subordinated to the realm of *necessity*, which does not amount to rejecting modern science or the whole metaphysical tradition but, on the contrary, to seeing them as subordinated to the *necessity of Being*. Bruno and Spinoza, in their philosophical approach to science, showed that it is a viable path. I advance this interpretation because this could be a fatal blow against anthropocentrism, as, whenever *necessity* and *fate* come into play, everything that springs from the human being, such as *science* and *technology*, is revealed to be nothing but *Being* delivering itself through *man*. The sclerosis of this movement only occurs when *man* conceives of himself as a *substratum*. This is why

¹⁴⁴ D. Farrell Krell, *Daimon Life. Heidegger and Life-Philosophy*, p. 304.

¹⁴⁵ M. Heidegger, *What is called Thinking*, p. 151.

the *Lichtung* is not an *instrument* of knowledge but an *openness* where the knower and the known are not separable or identifiable; from the point of view of the *Lichtung* the human being is caught up in the game of *clearing* and letting light come through. As was said before, though, Philosophy uses naturally inadequate intellectual tools and that is why it dwells with *gnosiology* and not with γνῶσις itself, which means that the state of γνῶσις is mediated by the λόγος and therefore it becomes thought, word and discourse. Only once discourse can reproduce the tension of this mediation, can philosophical practice occur. As Heidegger himself says in the *Postscript to "What is Metaphysics?"*:

Thinking, obedient to the voice of being, seeks from being the word through which the truth of being comes to language. Only when the language of historical human beings springs from the word does it ring true. Yet if it does ring true, then it is beckoned by the testimony granted it from the silent voice of hidden sources. The thinking of being protects the word, and in such protectiveness fulfils its vocation.¹⁴⁶

Here again, *thinking* is subordinated to the *hidden sources*; it is not a *thinking* for its own sake, not a theoretical contemplation, which means that *knowledge* as expressed by *thinking* and by words is, to use a Nietzschean expression, *human-all-too-human*. Humans, through knowledge, believe they are talking about *Being* but really they are being themselves talked by *Being*. How do they give voice to this *being talked by Being*? Not through the model of modern science, where the light of Reason observes, analyzes and states the truth, ignoring the truth of be-ing that speaks through it and therefore concealing the *necessity* which which it is indissolubly associated. It is not the light that clears and reveals; it is the *clearing* itself that lets the light through in the place where *Da-sein* finds its unity with *Being*. That is why a *gnosiology* in Heidegger is necessary: it renders explicit what it means to *know* without covering up the *openness* of the *Lichtung*.

¹⁴⁶ M. Heidegger, "Postscript to *What is Metaphysics?*", *Pathmarks*, edited by W. McNeill, Cambridge University Press, New York 2007, p. 237.

Section 2 - Gnosis, Clearing, Humanism

Even though the *Lichtung* has been framed within the horizon of *gnosiology*, it is not yet clear what kind of knowledge it is able to provide. Certainly not a scientific or theoretical kind based on the observation of *beings* or on a conceptual categorization of them. We said that *gnosiology* is not after the ἐπιστήμη but it is after a kind of *experience* that does not require the apprehension of particular notions by a *subject*. Nevertheless, the idea of *experience* evokes at first sight the necessity of determining *who* is undertaking a certain experience or is, at least, conscious of it. If in *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger attacks the Cartesian *subject* and reveals *Dasein* as *In-Der-Welt-Sein* [being-in-the-world], in his later writings he partially brackets the existential framework of *Dasein*'s everydayness and its possibility for Resoluteness in order to focus on an ontological perspective that would allow Being to be the true actor of its own disclosedness. Yet it would not be correct to interpret this move as a project for the dissolution of the *subject* by means of an ecstatic or Dionysian experience; instead, it has to do with the ethical project of reformulating the task of *thinking*. For now it will be enough to say that, if any non-epistemic knowledge can arise at all, it will not spring from any mental faculties belonging to a particular subject, but will stem from Being itself. In order to show this, I shall explore the gnosiological possibilities of such a perspective.

It may seem paradoxical to look for a non-theoretical and non-conceptual type of knowledge within the Western tradition, which is strongly rooted in the concept; yet it is at the very beginning of this tradition that Heidegger finds the elements to explore such a possibility. In the *Heraclitus Seminar*, conducted by Heidegger and Eugen Fink at the University of Freiburg in 1966-67, Heidegger claims:

Quintessence, inclosing, grasping and comprehending is already by itself un-Greek. With Heraclitus, there is no concept. And also, with Aristotle, there are still no concepts in the proper sense¹⁴⁷.

It is true, nevertheless, that the gestation of the concept does indeed begin with Plato and Aristotle; but what Heidegger means here is that the concept as we intend it (*conceptus*) is un-Greek because it has a peculiarly Latin nature that derives from the transposition of λόγος into Roman culture through the Stoics. A difference still stands, though, between the Presocratic thinkers, on the one hand, and Plato and Aristotle, on the other. Says Heidegger in the *Parmenides*:

Plato and Aristotle and subsequent thinkers have thought far “more”, have traversed more regions and strata of thinking, and have questioned out of a richer knowledge of things and man. And yet all these thinkers think “less” than the primordial thinkers¹⁴⁸.

It is not a matter of a temporal proximity to the *beginning* of thought, which is not characterized by a scientifically determined moment in history. Rather, it is a matter of the *beginning* itself that happens when Being is not theorized or developed around the idea of *presence*, but is exposed so as to reveal its immediacy and simplicity. This happens not through the formulation of a theory but through the exposition of a doctrine. We are not in the presence of the *philosopher* but of the σοφός, the one who possesses wisdom and sets out a didactic poem aimed at the ones who are ignorant; the gap between these σοφοί and Socratic ignorance is therefore substantial. What separates us from the Presocratics, then, is not a time-frame of 2500 years but the inability to think Being and the «capacity to hear the *few simple things* said in the words of the primordial thinkers»¹⁴⁹. We can start seeing, then, the knowing experience gained through gnosiology as a capacity of hearing, a tuning of our

¹⁴⁷ M. Heidegger, E. Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, translated by C. H. Seibert, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1993, by p. 27.

¹⁴⁸ M. Heidegger, *Parmenides*, translated by A. Schuwer and R. Rojcewicz, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1998, p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

thinking to a frequency we are not able to reach with the tools of theoretical knowledge.

Γνώσις is the type of grasping that is attributed to humans by Heraclitus in Fragment 7: «If all things were to become smoke, then we would discriminate them with the nose». «Would discriminate» is Diels' translation for διαγνοίεν, which refers to the capacity of discriminating within the τὰ πάντα [all things], *i.e.* the role of human cognizance in the distinction of *beings* within all things (τὰ πάντα) whose significance is a matter of debate between Heidegger and Fink from the very beginning of the *Seminar*: is τὰ πάντα to be understood as the totality of all individual things or as a cosmological whole or, again, as the Being of beings? The possible meaning of τὰ πάντα is examined in all the Heraclitean fragments where the expression appears; and what emerges, more than the actual meaning of τὰ πάντα, is its relations to lightning, sun, fire, to the one, to strife and to λόγος. All these relations, more than clarifying the meaning of τὰ πάντα, open up the problem of how a totality could actually relate to something external to it, thus ruling out the metaphysical interpretation of it, yet bringing to the fore the experience of a primordial outbreak of all things and the emergence of something unthought in Greek thinking. What is immediately interesting here, nevertheless, is not the nature of τὰ πάντα but the role of γνώσις, which is the human capacity for the knowledge of beings intended as *distinction*. It is, indeed, only a perspective, as it cannot be taken as what is ontologically responsible for the being of τὰ πάντα: even though humans have access to the knowledge of beings through γνώσις, which grants them the ability of distinguishing within the τὰ πάντα, it is not on such discriminating that the being of beings is based. Again, we are not in the presence of an active *subject* whose knowledge defines the Being of beings by distinguishing them: «διαγνοίεν is an indication that πάντα are characterized as what is distinguishable, but not what is already distinguished»¹⁵⁰. What makes τὰ πάντα distinguishable, then? If we looked

¹⁵⁰ M. Heidegger, E. Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, p. 19.

for a counterpart, an opposite polarity that would simply provide a complement to γνώσις, then human cognizance would be stigmatized as ontologically necessary and fall back into a subject-object dualism. Heidegger individuates what makes τὰ πάντα distinguishable in the λόγος, by referring to Heraclitus' Fragment 1: here Heraclitus, rather vehemently, accuses men of lacking any experience of how λόγος applies to each thing (τὰ πάντα). Again, we are faced not with a conceptual understanding but with an experience of the λόγος and cannot therefore blame Heidegger for rejecting its translation as *conceptus*. Its meaning is, instead, closely related to its occurring in τὰ πάντα as a *gathering* or, when thought as ἔν, as a *unifying* or, when thought as *Lightning*, as a *steering*. The plural form of τὰ πάντα allows for an understanding of this movement as the unifying of a plurality, which is at the same time an outbreak of the possibility of being distinguished. As the λόγος permeates τὰ πάντα, so the *Lightning* steers all things (Fragment 64) as a «sudden burst in the dark of night»¹⁵¹ and yet, Heidegger wonders, «isn't lightning eternal and not merely momentary?»¹⁵². Within this horizon, then, the experience of γνώσις is entirely dependent on what allows τὰ πάντα to be distinguishable, *i.e.* a primordial outbreak of a unifying plurality. The outbreak is the *origin* understood *intensive* [Latin]: Heidegger's question is a provocation, for he is aware that the outbreak cannot be determined in time; it is not a Big Bang. It is also not a unification of previously individual elements but the event (*Ereignis*) of a plurality that emerges as *one* through strife (πόλεμος). Λόγος, ἔν, πόλεμος, *Lightning* or fire, all express this primordial outbreak of τὰ πάντα and are the conditions of possibility for the human experience of τὰ πάντα, namely γνώσις. They are the *extensive* expression of the outbreak.

By extracting a notion of γνώσις from Heidegger's philosophical exegesis of Heraclitus, I could assert that the possibility of a gnosiology is viable in Heidegger's reading of Heraclitus and yet, one question must still be answered: is it also viable in Heidegger's thought? It will not be enough to restate the philosophical importance

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 10.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

that Heidegger attributes to the Presocratics as those who *think* the most, but an answer is indeed found in the *Heraclitus Seminar* itself. Throughout the whole seminar Heidegger tries to leave aside his own terminology¹⁵³; and any reference to Being is consciously avoided. Nonetheless, the move of holding off the words that identify Heidegger's thought is not driven by any scientific or objective methodology in the study of Heraclitus' fragments; it is rather a conscious stance within the hermeneutical circle, which introduces the Heideggerian vocabulary only once the Heraclitean ground is firm enough not to get illegitimately altered. A ground that is, nonetheless, never firm enough for a number of reasons: the fragmentary nature of the Heraclitean wisdom, which compels us to look at other sources in order to understand his writings (Greek poets, later philosophers) but mainly because he is a thinker who does not think metaphysically *yet*. For us, contemporary thinkers who *no longer* think metaphysically, the gap cannot be completely bridged. The answer is provided by Heidegger himself at the end of the *Seminar*:

HEIDEGGER: Is our concern only to repeat Heraclitus?

FINK: Our concern is a conscious confrontation with Heraclitus¹⁵⁴.

The conscious confrontation sees the philosophers' thinking as an active part of the inquiry and not as an analytical tool, thereby excluding the possibility of a merely philological enterprise. It is the gap itself that allows for a step further in thinking, as Heidegger sees, at the end, the greatest possibility of this confrontation with Heraclitus in what seems still to be unthought in Greek thinking and that is ἀλήθεια. I would like to report Heidegger's closing up in its entirety, as it is a crucial passage for seeing how he, after conducting the Seminar independently of "Heideggerian"

¹⁵³ "FINK: [...] The being moved of τὰ πάντα is also thought in the lighting up of entities in the clearing of lightning.

HEIDEGGER: At first, let us leave aside words like «clearing» or «brightness»". From M.

Heidegger, E. Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, p. 6

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

philosophy, finally takes off the mask and dives back into his own *thinking* and his own vocabulary:

ἀλήθεια thought as ἀλήθεια has nothing to do with “truth”; rather, it means unconcealment. What I then said in *Being and Time* about ἀλήθεια already goes in this direction. ἀλήθεια as unconcealment had already occupied me, but in the meantime “truth” came in between. ἀλήθεια as unconcealment heads in the direction of that which is the clearing. How about the clearing? You said last time that the clearing does not presuppose the light, but vice versa. Do clearing and light have anything at all to do with each other? Clearly not. “Clear” implies: to clear, to weigh anchor, to clear out. That does not mean that where the clearing clears, there is brightness. What is cleared is the free, the open. At the same time, what is cleared is what conceals itself. We may not understand the clearing from out of light; rather, we must understand it from the Greeks. Light and fire can first only find their place in the clearing. In the essay “On the Essence of Truth”, where I speak of “freedom”, I have the clearing in view, except that here truth always walked behind. The dark is, to be sure, without light, but cleared. Our concern is to experience unconcealment as clearing. That is what is unthought in what is thought in the entire history of thought. In Hegel, the need consisted in the satisfaction of thought. For us, on the contrary, the plight of what is unthought in what is thought reigns.¹⁵⁵

This powerful ending sums up in a few lines the development of Heidegger’s thinking from the perspective of unconcealment and also provides a deeper understanding of the *Lichtung* (clearing) in connection with the primordial outbreak of τὰ πάντα that allows for the possibility of γνώσις. As was stated earlier on, this *event* corresponds to the strife that characterizes such possibility and, furthermore, coincides with the Lightning that opens up the possibility instantaneously, yet for eternity. The Lightning itself is not to be seen as “light”, as it is the event itself that allows τὰ πάντα to be distinguishable; it is the *Lichtung* itself, the *openness* where *beings* come to the fore through the *concealment* of *Being*. On the one hand, then, the ontological weight is carried by the *Lichtung* but it is through γνώσις that knowledge as experience actually occurs, *i.e.* through the human access to the open region. Yet the meaning of the *Lichtung* still needs to be fully related to the primordial outbreak of Lightning. As was said above, the Lightning is instantaneous but eternal, *i.e.* the outbreak of τὰ πάντα as distinguishable is the opening of a region that *stays* open, no

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.161-2.

matter whether, from the perspective of knowing, it is illuminated by light or it sinks into the dark. The *Lichtung* is, then, from the perspective of γνώσις, yet to be explored; yet we do know that such an open region is already there and it is the precondition for ἀλήθεια to be experienced. When Heidegger says that ἀλήθεια “has nothing to do with truth”, he means that it has nothing to do with a propositional concept of truth based of the idea of correspondence. Yet, in *On the Essence of Truth* Heidegger had indeed stated that the *essence of truth* (as ἀλήθεια) is indeed *untruth* and such a statement cannot be understood without recurring to the notion of *Lichtung*. This means that in the open region [*Lichtung*] truth as ἀλήθεια, *i.e.* as *unconcealment*, can be experienced in virtue of the very possibility of being *concealed*: «Concealment deprives ἀλήθεια of disclosure yet does not render it στέρησις (privation); rather, concealment preserves what is most proper to ἀλήθεια as its own»¹⁵⁶. The possibility for ἀλήθεια to be experienced as *unconcealment* resides in the very fact that it is sheltered within the *clearing*, the open region that allows light to shine on the truth but also darkness to cover it up. It is thanks to this open region allowing the strife between concealment and unconcealment that beings can be *distinguished* and known. The notion of *sheltering* the *truth* is nothing but the *gnosiological* understanding of *memory*, which we encountered in the first chapter: Being that is kept in safety in order to be given.

To provide a concrete example on the ontic level, we could say that my experience of a chair as a chair happens through its unconcealment as a chair but also through its concealment as wood and straw or, even, as fuel for my fireplace but also as the concealment of the fact that it happens through concealment. What we defined as the “tip of the iceberg” in Spinoza here re-emerges as the play of truth. During such experience, though, truth is happening as it allows me to *distinguish* a chair as a chair in the distinguishable whole of τὰ πάντα. But I am not experiencing truth as the strife between concealment and unconcealment. In the modern world we

¹⁵⁶ M. Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth”, tr. by John Sallis, in M. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, edited by W. McNeill, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, p. 148.

experience *beings* as something objective, *i.e.* a chair is a chair, such an experience, though, does not require the acquaintance of the happening of truth that allows that chair to be a chair. That is why it is possible to live and be absolutely content with an idea of truth as correspondence, where the word «chair» is associated with the object «chair» and it functions perfectly within the equipment that allows me to live in the world. Such is the technological interpretation of the world, what Heidegger calls *Gestell* [Enframing], which enforces on the world the truth undisclosed by its own horizon, thus covering up that open region where that particular horizon arose through the strife between concealment and unconcealment. We could conclude that, in order to experience the world, we do not need any experience of truth as such, and it is thanks to the crystallization of the world into a specific horizon (the one of technology, in this instance) that truth acquires its narrow significance as correspondence or correctness. In *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger gives one possibility for not receding into this limited conception of truth, again, by recurring to the notion of *Lichtung*:

The openness of this open region, that is, truth, can be what it is, namely *this* openness, only if and as long as it establishes itself within its open region. Hence there must be always some being in this open region, in which the openness takes its stand and attains its constancy. In thus taking possession of the open region, openness holds it open and sustains it. [...] Clearing of openness and establishment in the open region belong together¹⁵⁷.

The openness of the open region, then, appears as the experience of a strife that tries to maintain the access to the open region, where the truth (as unconcealment *through* concealment) actually happens. Heidegger talks exactly about *strife* in the same lecture, a strife between *earth*, which is identified with the open region itself and *world*, which is the level of experience of beings as equipment or mere objects. It is almost impossible not to recognize the Heraclitean πόλεμος, another of the forms in which the outbreak of τὰ πάντα as distinguishable happens. Truth, then, appears as

¹⁵⁷ M. Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, tr. by D. Farrell Krell, in M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, edited by D. Farrell Krell, Routledge, London 2007, p. 186.

an extremely complex and dynamic experience; Julian Young summarizes it in a very effective way: «It is a complex of four elements: the undisclosed (earth), the disclosed (world in the ontic sense), the horizon of disclosure (world in the ontological sense) and man (the discloser)»¹⁵⁸.

Setting up this experience of truth in terms of *gnosiology* had as an objective the clarification of the *knower* (in the gnosiological sense we have been investigating) or, in Young's words, of the "discloser". We operated an extraction of γνώσις from Heidegger's thought through his study of Heraclitus and what this extraction achieves, then, is a renewed interest in the human role, albeit free from any philosophy of the *subject*. In the world that has covered up the possibility of the openness of the open region, the only way to experience knowledge is ἐπιστήμη, which is the prerogative of a *subject*, intended metaphysically. My question is, then: what kind of *knower* (or discloser) emerges from γνώσις? The answer appears simple: obviously the knower is the one who stands in the openness of the open region, thus experiencing the happening of truth as unconcealment of the concealed. Nevertheless, when considering the reflections carried out so far, the answer sounds merely tautological and does not exhaust the potentiality of the question. In order to give a more substantial answer, the only way is to *complicate* it through the investigation of such a knower, *i.e.* man conceived as *human*, bearing in mind that we cannot afford to fall back into *subjectivism* and not even into *anthropocentrism*. The possibility of a *human* being a *subject* is strongly dismissed by Heidegger in the *Letter on Humanism*:

Of course the essential worth of the human being does not consist in his being the substance of beings, as the Subject among them, so that as the tyrant of being he may deign to release the beingness of beings into an all too loudly glorified "objectivity"¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁸ Julian Young, *Heidegger's Later Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, p. 10.

¹⁵⁹ M. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", in M. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, p. 252.

From the point of view of knowledge, then, which is the one that has concerned this section all along, we can confirm the exclusion of a strong ontological role in the constitution of beings by the human being that is the view held and perpetrated by metaphysics, which

recognizes the clearing of being either solely as the view of what is present in “outward appearance” or critically as what is seen in the perspective of categorial representation on the part of subjectivity. This means that the truth of being as the clearing itself remains concealed for metaphysics¹⁶⁰.

The knowing experience (γνώσις) has to shift from a constitutive perspective to what we could improperly define as a *positional* one. I say “improperly” as it does not have to be conceived in terms of position in the physical space but in terms of an ontological engagement, *i.e.* standing in the clearing while keeping the constancy of the openness and therefore the experience of truth as unconcealment. Heidegger lays the foundations for this possibility in *Sein und Zeit* itself, by choosing to carry out an “existential analytic of *Da-sein*”: «the human being occurs essentially in such a way that he is the “there” [*das “Da”*], that is, the clearing of being. The being of the *Da*, and only it, has the fundamental character of ek-sistence, that is, of an ecstatic inherence in the truth of being»¹⁶¹. «Ek-sistence» here means the *being-out-there* of human life, being exposed to projection and possibility within the open region. The different spelling for *existence* (ek-sistence) adopted by Heidegger also indicates that he is not interested in the metaphysical opposition *essence/existence*, according to which Sartre makes his case for Humanism by stating that «existence precedes essence». Heidegger dismisses the possibility of Humanism, which he sees as a naïve anthropocentrism precisely for not ascribing enough dignity to the *human*. He insists on this point through a genealogy of the very term *humanitas*, which emerges from the encounter of the Greek world with the Roman one and ends up being an exquisitely Roman term that would serve to oppose the civilized Roman man to the

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.248.

Barbarian. The translation of the Greek term παιδεία, which constitutes the educational foundation of Greek civilization, as *humanitas* completely changes its significance. What is lost in translation is not only the mere meaning of the word but the originary understanding of the *human* that belonged to the Greek. We should not forget, as was mentioned at the beginning of this section, that Parmenides' poem is also a didactic and educational enterprise that springs from an originary proximity with Being.

From this understanding of the origin of the word *humanitas*, Heidegger also dismisses Italian Humanism and the Renaissance as a *renascentia romanitatis* and not as a rediscovery of the Greek origin. In the first part of my work I tried to show how this judgement on Renaissance Humanism is at least questionable and overlooks the importance of the philosophy that emerged from this complex and flourishing civilization, which is not merely to be identified with a philological and historical enterprise. In this section I would like to make a similar statement, yet from the point of view of knowledge as I have been treating it so far, that is from the point of view of standing in the *Lichtung*, *i.e.* from the point of view of what was recognized as γνώσις. Obviously the notion of γνώσις in what was the humanist turn from Aristotle to Neoplatonism, still retains, as in Ficino, a strong metaphysical connotation. Such a connotation is linked to the experience of contemplation and therefore cannot be cited as an example of that human knowledge, albeit deprived of *subjectivity*, that we have been seeking so far. Nevertheless the aim here is not to recuperate a previously formulated notion of γνώσις but to grant it a renewed meaning deriving from the confrontation that has started with Heidegger's encounter with Heraclitus and that will proceed with Renaissance Humanism. Ernesto Grassi, in his lectures on *Heidegger and Renaissance Humanism*, is profoundly convinced that an experience of the *Lichtung* already happens in the philosophy of the Renaissance. Such an experience radically rejects the metaphysical and logical tradition of the Middle Ages but it does not lead to the Cartesian turn either: «Historically, we should note that Heidegger's definition of Western thought – as rational deductive

metaphysics which arises and unfolds exclusively from the problem of the relationships between beings and thought, *i.e.* in the framework of the question of logical truth, does not hold. In the Humanist tradition, there was always a central concern for the problem of the primacy of unhiddenness, openness, that in which historical “being-there” can first appear»¹⁶². The Humanist struggle against language as a logical tool that produces a truth that is mere correspondence results in the opening up of a *Lichtung* in which new possibilities can appear. If knowledge no longer happens through logical investigation, we can see the emergence of a new experience of knowing that brings us back to the type of original wisdom that belonged to the Presocratics, the coming back together of thing and word, such as in Giovanni Pontano: «Pontano, however, argues that in the “original” word we cannot distinguish between form and matter, for the simple reason that the word is original»¹⁶³. A premise of this type opens up a possibility for giving new vigour to the Heideggerian conception of language as the «house of being» and to its exploration in terms of its knowing potentialities as γνῶσις. Grassi carefully examines many Renaissance authors, thus building a conceptual path that would sustain a renovated dialogue between Heidegger and Renaissance Humanism. But this is only a hint we have provided. Bearing this in mind, I would like to take Grassi’s arguments even further and explore the notion of γνῶσις so far extracted from Heidegger within the gnosiology of Giordano Bruno.

¹⁶² E. Grassi, “Humanism and the End of Philosophy”, in E. Grassi, *Heidegger & the Question of Renaissance Humanism: Four Studies*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, New York 1983, p.29.

¹⁶³ E. Grassi, “The Humanist Tradition”, in E. Grassi, *Heidegger & the Question of Renaissance Humanism: Four Studies*, p. 53.

Chapter V – Shadows

Section 1 – The Hand

Modernity is the history of a success based on a quest for *knowledge* identified with *epistemology*. The Italian historian of science Paolo Rossi offers a very clear account of the Cartesian success: «One of the reasons of the success of Descartes' grand construction was that it was introduced to European culture as a *system*. A system founded on reason, with no mention of the occult and vitalism and seemingly capable of linking (differently from medieval Scholasticism) the science of nature, natural philosophy and religion. Last but not least, it offered men a coherent, harmonious and complete picture of the world in a doubt-ridden era of intellectual revolution»¹⁶⁴. It is a comforting image Descartes is offering, together with an objectified nature, which can be investigated without the danger of getting involved with spiritual matters, which belong to the sphere of the *Subject*, *i.e.* to another *substance*. In Bruno, as we saw in Chapter II of our work, matter is animated, *i.e.* the World Soul is present – not in virtue of an interaction with a non-material substance but in virtue of *composition*. The Cartesian dualism severs mind and body into two substantial realities, which is common to that kind of mathematical attitude Bruno was trying to contrast, that of *division*: Descartes sets the standards of Being by dividing that which can be doubted from that which cannot be doubted. Bruno's attitude follows a radically different attitude by *numerating* parts from the point of view of *composition* in relation to the one who is *numerating*. Thus, *atoms* or parts only make sense in virtue of the fact that they are *composed* in a compound and can only be *numerated* as parts of the compound – and not by abstract division – in virtue of a *relational minimum*. What we described as the activity of γνώσις within τὰ πάντα is figured in Bruno as a distinguishing activity that happens through a

¹⁶⁴ P. Rossi, *The Birth of Modern Science*, translated by C. De Nardi Ipsen, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 2001, p. 99.

relational determination of the *knower* and the *known*: it is the *minimum* which steers the τὰ πάντα in its being distinguished.

One question is still pending. If it is up to *man* – the *knower* – as intelligent being, to *numerate* and if Bruno postulates no “I”, then how does the relation between the being who *numerates* and the compound of numerated *minima* – *atoms* – take place? Coherently with what was explored at the end of Chapter II, we can affirm that Bruno proceeds differently from Descartes, *i.e.* he does not postulate any unnecessary metaphysical structure similar to a Subject, which would need to be separated from an object and then somehow recomposed with it. Ontologically, there appears to be no difference: as such, *man* is as much of a compound as any other being, he participates in the World Soul, thus in the living, infinite *matter*. He is himself distinguished within τὰ πάντα. It was mentioned how Bruno’s philosophy employs different registers, that of *identity* and that of *difference*, as happened in the case of the *intensive* and *extensive* infinite, in order to account for the coincidence of the ἔν καὶ Πάν with the infinite variety and vicissitude of nature. Within the *undistinguished* One-and-All, there is no ontological gap, each thing expresses the World Soul in virtue of its particular *composition* and also of its relation to other compounds. Indeed, as the ἔν καὶ Πάν is *extensively* infinite and *intensively* infinite in each of its particular beings, the World Soul participates with different *intensity* in the existing compounds in virtue of their *omni-relational* mode of existence. What makes the *human* compound different and enables it to participate in the World Soul with a particularly strong intensity is its particular *composition*. Such a unique composition is exemplified by the *hand*. Heraclitus is right in saying that if all things were smoke, we would distinguish them with the nose but all things offer themselves to manipulation and therefore they are distinguished by *man* through the *hand*. Bruno stresses the importance of the *hand* in more than one place. In the *Spaccio*, although in a highly allegorical manner, Sophia declares:

And [Jove] added that the gods had given intellect and hands to man and made him similar to them, giving him power over the other animals. This consists not only in his being able to operate according to his nature and to what is usual, but also to operate outside the laws of nature, in order that by forming or being able to form other natures, other paths, other categories, with his intelligence, by means of that liberty without which he would not have the above-mentioned similarity, he would succeed in preserving himself as god of the earth. That nature certainly when it becomes idle will be frustrating and vain, just as are useless the eye that does not see and the hand that does not grasp. And for this reason Providence has determined that he be occupied in action by means of his hands, and in contemplation by means of his intellect, so that he will not contemplate without action and will not act without contemplation.¹⁶⁵

Bruno did not believe in Creation anymore than he believed in Providence. What is really of interest here is that *intellect* and *hands* are intimately tied together: man «will not contemplate without action and will not act without contemplation». Translating our discourse in Cartesian terms, this clearly suggests that, if there has to be a *res cogitans*¹⁶⁶ at all, it is coessential to the *res extensa*, in the shape of an organ named the *hand*. It is even possible to hear virtual echoes of the “existential analytic of *Dasein*”: the world presents itself in its «manipulability» as *equipment* that is grasp-able, in its readiness-to-hand [*Zuhandenheit*] and «intelligence», man’s ability to contemplate, reveals its inadequacy to capture such readiness-to-hand. In Heidegger’s words: «No matter how sharply we just *look* at the “outward appearance” of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand. If we look at Things just “theoretically”, we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand»¹⁶⁷. In the same way, Bruno does not take for granted the theoretical look, which makes sense only in the light of the *hand* «grasping», as *man* «will not contemplate without action». Furthermore, he adds an

¹⁶⁵ G. Bruno, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, translated and with an introduction by A. D. Imerti, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln NE 2004, p. 205.

¹⁶⁶ We are immediately drawn to Heidegger’s severe judgement: «Everyone who is acquainted with the Middle Ages sees that Descartes is “dependent” upon medieval scholasticism and employs its terminology. But with this “discovery” nothing is achieved philosophically as long as it remains obscure to what a profound extent the medieval ontology has influenced the way in which posterity has determined or failed to determine the ontological character of the *res cogitans*. The full extent of this cannot be estimated until both the meaning and the limitations of the ancient ontology have been exhibited in terms of an orientation directed towards the question of Being» from M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 46-47.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

important function to the role of the *hand*, the one of «creating natures» while always being part of *nature* itself, thus indicating *man's difference* in virtue of his *identity* with *nature*. As we saw during his exchange with Mordente, for Bruno artificiality is as natural as things of *nature*. His notion of creativity, which we shall examine in Chapter VIII, will coincide with *nature's* creativity and will be at the centre of the Nolan's Art of Memory. For now we shall only note how *man* is emerging as a *knower* – or *measurer, numerator*¹⁶⁸ – in virtue of his particular composition and not in virtue or in spite of an ontological gap. Again, in the *Cabala of Pegasus*, the coessentiality between the *hand* and the *soul* is more explicitly stated in the context of a discussion regarding metempsychosis:

ONORIO: That [the soul: *ed.*] of the human is the same in specific and generic essence as that of flies, sea oysters and plants, and of anything whatsoever that one finds animated or having a soul, as no body lacks a more or less lively communication of spirit within itself. Now such a spirit, according to fate or providence, decree or fortune, links up now with one species of body, now with another; and by reason of the diversity of constitutions and limbs, it comes to have diverse degrees and capabilities of mind and functions. [...] And that such be the truth, consider its subtlety a bit and examine within yourself what would be, if, supposing that man had twice the brains he has, and the active intellect would shine so much more clearly, and with all that his hands would become transformed into the shape of two feet, all the rest remaining in its ordinary whole; tell me, how might the conduct of mankind be unaltered? How could the families and leagues of such people, any more than of horses, deer, pigs, be established and continue without being devoured by innumerable species of beasts, being thus subject to greater and more certain ruin? And consequently where would the institutions of knowledge, the invention of disciplines, the congregations of citizens, the structures of the buildings and other things in great quantity that signify human grandeur and excellence, and make man truly the victor over the other species? All this, if you look cautiously, refers primarily not so much to the style of mind, as to that of the hand, organ of the organs.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ At the time of the *Spaccio* (1584) Bruno has not yet developed a proper atomistic theory, which will be theorized in the Frankfurt poems (1591); in this instance we are engrafting *man* as the *knower* and *manipulator* on his mathematical role of *numerator*, thus making parallel moves along the different points of access to Bruno's gnosiology. It is a characteristic feature of the Nolan's philosophy to have more than one access to truth and we are proceeding coherently with such notion.

¹⁶⁹ G. Bruno, *The Cabala of Pegasus*, translated and annotated by S. L. Sondergard & M. U. Sowell, Yale University Press, London 2002, pp. 56-58. For the original version see G. Bruno, "Cabala del Cavallo Pegaseo", in G. Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, vol. II, commented by G. Aquilecchia, edited by N. Ordine, UTET, Torino 2007, pp. 452-454: «Quella dell'uomo è medesima in essenza specifica e generica con quella della mosche, ostreche marine e piante, e di qualsivoglia cosa che si

The «organ of the organs»¹⁷⁰, then, allows for the most brilliant spirit, intellect and wits that can be found in *nature* and gives *man* the keys not only to his own survival but to his supremacy over the other beasts and yet, we cannot exclude *a priori* the possibility of a greater intellect dictated by a more complex configuration – just as human nature, as was said in Chapter II, cannot be fixed or constant. Again, this is stated with the proviso that beasts or plants do not qualitatively differ from *man* as far as their soul is concerned: *man*'s soul is as complex as his configuration – which we have called *composition* in the light of Bruno's later works – allows. It is, therefore, a *reductio ad absurdum* to suppose that *man* could possibly be endowed with an intellect which was twice as powerful and be deprived of his hands, as everything that is owed to his intellect would be missing with the privation of *hands* – unless his *hands* themselves were replaced by a more powerful configuration. As Ansaldi observes: «Human nature thus attains to the possession of its *power* [*puissance*] – cognitive and practical – starting from the use of the organ that designs his specific

trove animata o abbia anima: come non è corpo che non abbia o più o meno vivace e perfettamente comunicazione si spirito in se stesso. Or cotal spirito secondo il fato o providenza, ordine o fortuna, viene a giongersi or ad una specie di corpo, or ad un'altra: e secondo la ragione della diversità di complessioni e membri, viene ad avere diversi gradi e perfezzioni d'ingegno et operazioni. [...] E che ciò sia la verità, considera un poco al sottile, et essamina entro a te stesso quel che sarrebbe se posto che l'uomo avesse al doppio d'ingegno che non have, e l'intelletto agente gli splendesse tanto più chiaro che non gli splende, e con tutto ciò le mani gli venisser transformate in forma de doi piedi, rimanendogli tutto l'altro nel suo ordinario intiero: dimmi dove potrebbe *impune* esser la conversazion de gli uomini, come potrebbero instituirsi e durar le fameglie et unioni di costoro parimente o più che de cavalli, cervii, porci, senza esserno divorati da innumerabili specie de bestie per essere in tal maniera soggetti a maggiore e più certa ruina? e per conseguenza dove sarrebbono le istituzioni de dottrine, le invenzioni de discipline, le congregazioni de cittadini, le strutture de gli edificii, et altre cose assai che significano la grandezza et eccellenza umana, e fanno l'uomo trionfator veramente invito sopra l'altre specie? Tutto questo, se oculatamente guardi, si riferisce non tanto principalmente al dettato de l'ingegno, quanto a quello della mano, organo de gli organi».

¹⁷⁰ Here Bruno, as Aquilecchia underlines in his note to the text, quotes Aristotle, *De Anima*, III, 8, 432 a i. As Saverio Ansaldi affirms: «Bruno reinterprets here the famous Aristotelian definition of the hand as organ of organs in the light of a question that leads him to the definition of what one may call 'organic anthropology'». From S. Ansaldi, *Nature et puissance. Giordano Bruno et Spinoza*, Kimé, Paris 2006, p. 42. My translation from the French: «Bruno réinterprète ici la célèbre définition aristotélicienne de la main comme organe des organes à la lumière d'une problématique qui le conduit à la définition de ce qu'on pourrait appeler une 'anthropologie organique'».

belonging to the natural order of beings. This means that the perfection of this nature is founded on the process of perpetual interaction between human activity and its environment – in a word, what results from its practice. Bruno does not grant man any natural dignity, but, at the same time, it is precisely in virtue of such a desubstantialisation of human nature that he legitimates his moral dignity starting from the effort of cognizance and activity»¹⁷¹. Bruno's position simply cannot correspond to the object of Heidegger's attack we explored in the previous chapter. Bruno manages to conciliate, through his skilled handling of the registers of identity and difference, *man's* humanity and its distinctness within the One-and-All without recurring to any ontological gap between humanity and *nature*. Bruno's γνώσις is nothing but the *relational* constitution of *man* that, within τὰ πάντα, is determined and determines as a “*hand-equipped*” being. *Man's* dignity as a *human* is preserved in virtue of his ontological belonging to τὰ πάντα, into which he does not dissolve but he is distinguished through his act of distinction. Heidegger, who does little to provide a more thorough appreciation of Renaissance humanism and dismisses it as *renascentia romanitatis*, considers *humanitas* a term that mistranslates παιδεία. It is Heidegger who mistranslates Renaissance humanism, somehow conferring a generalized and Cartesian meaning to it: Heidegger already projects onto *humanitas* the characteristics of a rational *subject* by isolating it from *nature*. In Bruno this is definitely not the case.

Bruno's Philosophy, in the sense we have so far explored it, is uncompromising. We have seen Bruno ferociously attacking Aristotle but also Neoplatonism. In the Italian writings we have partially explored a phenomenology of the *hand*, which led us to conclude that its cognitive power is intimately dependent on

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43. My translation from the French: «La nature humaine parvient ainsi à la possession de sa *puissance* – cognitive et pratique – à partir de l'usage de l'organe qui désigne son appartenance spécifique à l'ordre naturel des êtres. Cela signifie que la perfection de cette nature se fonde sur les processus d'interaction perpétuels entre l'activité humaine et son milieu – c'est-à-dire ce qu'il résulte de sa pratique. Bruno ne reconnaît à l'homme aucune dignité naturelle, mais, en même temps, c'est précisément en vertu de cette desubstantialisation de la nature humaine qu'il légitime sa dignité morale à partir de l'effort cognitif et de l'activité».

the *hand's* ontological identity and intimacy with the world. Such intimacy is expressed through its participation in the World Soul but also through its figurative, thus extensive, composition. It is the particular figuration that corresponds to a major intensity of the participation in the World Soul and its cognitive and practical power. In other words, *man's* intellectual superiority cannot be severed from his *handling* of the world. In Bruno's earlier Latin writings, where the the relationship with Neoplatonism grows more and more complex¹⁷², we can nevertheless find the same play of *identity* and *difference* from a purely metaphysical point of view, where the Neoplatonic *hypostases* are bent to the necessity of making sense of man's cognitive powers. The rigid and transcendent hierarchy of Plotinus' system makes Bruno uncomfortable, as it posits sense and intellect on two different levels, as he declares in the *Sigillus Sigillorum*:

And as in every moment we experience sensations, surely we consider sense completely in our power, whilst about the intellect the Platonists are in doubt, because we do not always operate with our intellect and because it [the intellect: *ed.*] is separated; and it is separated – they say – because it is not the intellect that bends towards us, it is we who look upwards in order to look for it. Nevertheless, they fool us and themselves; it is more appropriate to figure the intellect as bending towards us and we towards it, in a way that it is ours as we are its. We belong to the intellect, as a matter of fact, because its light makes us perennially present to it, even though it is not perpetually present to us. As a consequence it is not always ours, as we do not always understand it, we are not always enlightened.¹⁷³

¹⁷² In Eugenio Canone's words: «In his Parisian writings, Bruno arrived at a number of theoretical insights that were decisively important for the further development of his thought. Although he had written explicitly of the relationship between nature and *ars* in the *Ars Memoriae* and the *Candelaio*, and had given a precise account of the unity between the physical world and the human spirit, it was necessary to develop such reflections in the context of one specific epistemology. Besides this, he still lacked some fundamental building bricks for his real aim, namely, a new and complete natural philosophy on the basis of the Platonic and Plotinian metaphysics, which in turn was oriented to a "cosmology" derived from the Pythagoreans, from Heraclitus, Democritus, and other Pre-Socratics. Bruno took an important, strongly monistic step, above all on the gnoseological level, in the *Sigillus sigillorum*, where we find a conception of the faculties of the soul (mind, imagination, reason and understanding) as degrees of one and the same reality. He parts company with Plotinus against a completely immanentist background». From E. Canone, "Giordano Bruno (1548-1600). Clarifying the Shadows of Ideas", in P. R. Blum, *Philosophers of the Renaissance*, p. 226.

¹⁷³ G. Bruno, "Sigillus Sigillorum", in G. Bruno, *Opere Mnemotecnica* II, directed by M. Ciliberto, edited by M. Matteoli, R. Sturlese, N. Tirinnanzi, Adelphi, Milano 2009, p. 210. My translation from the Latin, also based on the facing-page Italian translation in the same volume: «Sensum

Once more, the knowing movement is twofold and it is not a mere ascending process. There is, nevertheless, an element of *difference*: *sense* is not only permanently present to us but also in our control; *intellect*, on the other hand, is present yet not always in our possession. Now, this rift between *sense* and *intellect* is somehow generated by the intermediate faculties of *imagination* and *reason*. Bruno seems here to follow a very traditional scheme of which we can give a rough sketch: *sense* – on the vegetative level – generates accidental and rather obscure *forms* in the *imagination* – on the animal level – which, in the case of humans, provides *reason* with less obscure *forms* that *reason* will elaborate in such a way as to reach the essential *forms* of the *intellect*¹⁷⁴. Each faculty corresponds to an increasingly complex form of life and cognitive power in a seemingly typical Neoplatonic ascending fashion, integrated with the Aristotelian notion of a tripartite soul – vegetative, animal and rational. Yet, only a few pages later, Bruno does not miss the occasion to distinguish himself from both the Neoplatonic and the Aristotelian schemes:

And surely by means of a connection, which is not weak, a union and maybe even a certain unity and identity, it happens that from the elemental faculty the vegetative one is produced, from this concupiscence and sense, from those reason and imagination, from which at last descend will and intellect; and on the basis of this it can be shown in a conclusive manner that if in sense is given participation in the intellect, then sense will be the intellect itself.¹⁷⁵

quidem – quia sentimus semper – iudicamus esse nostrum, de intellectu vero ambigunt Platonici, et quia eo non semper utimur et quia est separatus : separatus, inquiunt, quia non ipse annuit ad nos, sed potius nos ad ipsum superne aspicientes. At fallunt et falluntur ita dicentes ; magis enim convenit, ut intelligamus et ipsum nos et ipsum ad nos et nos ad ipsum adpellere, unde et illenoster et nos illius. Nos quidem semper illius, quia nos semper illuminans perpetuo praesentes habet, quantumvis non ille nobis perpetuo praesens, et consequenter non semper ille noster, quia non semper intendimus, nec semper illuminamur».

¹⁷⁴ See *ibid.* p. 212: «The forms of things in the mind are always essential [...]». My translation from the Latin: «Formae rerum in mente sunt omnino essentialia [...]».

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 216-218. My translation from the Latin: «Et certe a non imbecilli connexione, unione et forte unitate et identitate quadam provenit, quod a facultate elementativa vegetativa perficitur, ab ac concupiscentia et sensus, ab iis ratio et imaginatio, a quibus tandem voluntas atque intellectus; ex quibus demonstrative concludi potest, quod si in sensu sit participatio[ne] intellectus, sensus erit intellectus ipse».

What Bruno affirms here, which is the *identity* of *sense* and *intellect*, denies one of the pillars of Neoplatonic ontology, which is the opposition between the scarce reality and untruth provided by the senses and the truth and reality provided by the intellect. In Bruno the difference is not *ontological*, it is *gnosiological*. On the one hand, the so-called *form* or *idea* – the direct expression of reality and truth – delivers itself through different faculties in an increasingly essential manner; on the other hand, the intellectual distinction is not a *real* one. For instance, whether I conceive of sunlight as nourishment searched for by a plant or I feel it warming my hand up or I formulate a photonic theory of light, the distinction between those different acquaintances with the same thing remains formal. Really, the *intellect* is nothing transcendent or hierarchical: *man*, as such, always knows within the light of the intellect, he is not *enlightened* by it. In Heideggerian terms, man always stands in the *Lichtung*. Faculties are fictions of reason, occasions for *man* to inhabit truth through the experience of *forms* and for *forms* to be a simple essence that, nonetheless, «necessarily divides, distinguishes and multiplies itself within the substratum»¹⁷⁶. *Man* and *forms* both inhabit the substratum in a situation of coessentiality that is also codetermining and that recalls the notion of γνῶσις that we extracted from Heidegger’s interpretation of Heraclitus: a *knowing* experience that distinguishes within unity. In De Bernart’s observations on the *gnosiology* found in the *Sigillus* we can infer we might be on the right track:

The Brunian critique of the theory of “impressions” seems, as a matter of fact, to recall a gnosiology that focuses on the influence exerted on the knowing subject as a determining factor, putting it on the same level as the known object, *i.e.* the features of sensation. Although, differently from Sextus Empiricus, who had characterized his “anti-dogmatic” polemic on the impossibility of getting out of the subjective sphere, [...] in order to know the “truth” of the things themselves, belonging to the objective sphere, Bruno aims, through the concept of “nature”, at the re-absorption of the subject itself, similarly to the “object”, within the thread of relations according to which the universal reality is structured. From this it follows that, if the content of the senses is never for Bruno an inert and faithful “copy” of the object, it is neither something irreducibly other than the object itself and pertaining solely to the subjective sphere: it is

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 218. My translation from the Latin: «[...] in subiecto dividi, distingui et multiplicari necessum est».

a *natural fact*, the product of a contact, of the reciprocal tension between subject and object [...].¹⁷⁷

Even though, in my opinion, the terminology of *subject* and *object* covers up the undivided point of departure of Bruno's thinking, De Bernart rightly depicts the *knowing act* as an event that happens within *nature*, as an internal movement and discrimination that, while discriminating and distinguishing, restates its unity. On the other hand – if observed in Heideggerian terms – when the *knowing act* turns into a mere *distinguishing*, not within but outside the *unity*, then we witness the triumph of *Enframing* [*Gestell*], the end of the practice of truth and its codification into the incontrovertible metaphysical closure and isolation, which is the feature of τέχνη or, rather, of its modern translation as *cybernetics*.

Bruno's vision of the *hand*, as we have seen, is antithetical to the technical power of *man* as a conquering and severing event. Bruno has provided us with a precious access to the cognitive power of a de-substantialised man and has developed a notion of the human that combines *composition*, from the material point of view of the atoms, and *intensity*, from the spiritual-material perspective of the World Soul. In other words, *man* has encountered his coincidence with what is *known*, yet becoming a *knower*, practising that knowledge we envisaged while staring at the Heraclitean origin, γνώσις. What strikes us is that the practice of such a *gnosiology* becomes possible only once *man* recognizes his belonging to the world of *beasts*, plants, stones, yet remaining the only one amongst those who can grant such a recognition.

¹⁷⁷ L. De Bernart, *Immaginazione e scienza in Giordano Bruno*, pp. 26, 27. My translation from the Italian: «La critica bruniana alla teoria della 'impressione' sembra infatti rinviare a una gnoseologia che pone in primo piano la condizionatezza naturale del soggetto conoscente come fattore determinante, alla stessa stregua di quella dell'oggetto conosciuto, i caratteri della sensazione. Solo che, a differenza di Sesto Empirico, che aveva imperniato la sua polemica 'antidommatica' sulla impossibilità di uscire dalla sfera del soggettivo (in cui si collocava per Sesto qualsiasi contenuto mentale come qualsiasi criterio di giudizio umano) per conoscere la 'verità' delle cose in sé, appartenente alla sfera dell'oggettivo, Bruno mira, attraverso il concetto di 'natura', a proporre il riassorbimento del 'soggetto' stesso, alla stessa stregua dell'oggetto', entro la trama dei rapporti 'invisibili' secondo cui si struttura la realtà universale. Da ciò deriva che, se il portato dei sensi non è mai per Bruno una 'copia' inerte e fedele dell'oggetto, non è neanche qualcosa di radicalmente e irriducibilmente 'altro' rispetto all'oggetto stesso e di pertinente solo alla sfera soggettiva: esso è un *fatto naturale*, il prodotto di un contatto, di una tensione reciproca tra soggetto e oggetto [...].»

Within such *animality* lies human freedom, which opens up a great horizon for the *hand-endowed beast*, that is, *man*. Eugenio Canone, quoting and paraphrasing the *Spaccio*, explains this really well: «“The pig – observes Bruno – does not wish to die for he wouldn’t be pig, the horse greatly fears being de-horsed. Jove...maximally fears not being Jove”. The fear of death concerns, then, at once, the loss of individuality both as an individual and as species, together with the nightmare of living the experience of separation of body from soul, of badly incarnated souls, so effectively described in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. All this implies for man – an indistinct nature between beast and heavenly animal, thus free to turn into whatever he wishes – that it is not so much necessary to remain tied to what one is, *i.e.* “maintaining and preserving oneself in the present being”, exactly in virtue of the power of modifying oneself and, through, one’s *ars*, the surrounding world»¹⁷⁸. Here Canone extrapolates conclusions that are, at once, *ontological*, *gnosiological* and *ethical*. The *composition* of *man as hand-endowed* does indeed give him the chance to transform the surrounding world and to *know* it. Nonetheless, it does not necessarily imply his *ontological* subsistence as a categorized – and therefore *metaphysical* – species because its very endowment provides him with the faculty of transforming *nature* and therefore *man himself* as *nature*. It is only when *man* inscribes his own species as *humanity*, only once he conclusively determines his *difference*, that he loses the very chance of being human, *i.e.* transforming *nature*, thus *himself*. In Heideggerian terms, we could say that *Dasein* loses itself once it

¹⁷⁸ E. Canone, “Una profonda notte animale”, in E. Canone, *Il dorso e il grembo dell’eterno*, Bruniana e Campanelliana, Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, Pisa-Roma 2003, pp. 192-193. My translation from the Italian: «“Il porco – osserva Bruno – “non vuol morire per non esser porco, il cavallo massime paventa di scavallare. Giove... sommamente teme di non esser Giove”. Il timore della morte riguarderebbe quindi, nel contempo, la perdita dell’identità sia come individuo che come specie, con l’incubo di vivere nell’esperienza di estraniamento dell’anima dal corpo, di anime cioè male incarnate, così efficacemente descritta nelle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio. Tutto questo comporta per l’uomo – natura incerta e sospesa tra la bestia e l’animale celeste, libero pertanto di trasformarsi in quello che vuole – che è necessario non tanto rimanere legati a quello che si è, ossia “mantenersi e conservarsi nell’esser presente” quanto aprirsi a quello che si può essere, “sempre oltre quel che possiede”, proprio in virtù del potere di modificare se stesso e, con la sua *ars*, il mondo che lo circonda».

interprets *Being* as *presence*, furthermore rejecting the projection of its *Being-towards-Death*. Bruno, in the *Spaccio*, identified the existential fear of *death* with the interpretation of *being as presence*, which is fear of losing one's own individuality, whether that of a pig or of a human that leads to the rejection of the very idea of death. According to Bruno, *death* is simply part of the vicissitude of *nature*, a change in our *composition* and therefore not separable from our vicissitudinal nature as transformers and transformed. In Division II of *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger affirms that «Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. “As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die”»¹⁷⁹, which means that *Dasein*'s totality is as open as Bruno describes it when he rejects *death* as a loss of individuality. Furthermore, individuality, as such, loses any substantial feature as it crystallizes presence; and therefore the fear of *death*, as loss of individuality, makes even less sense, which means that there is no special mission to fulfil for *man*, no existential task that *death* can interrupt or complete. We imagine Heidegger would agree with this as «In death, Dasein has not been fulfilled nor has it simply disappeared; it has not become finished nor is it wholly at one's disposal as something ready-to-hand»¹⁸⁰. We can conclude, then, that the *hand*, as such, is not the place of *technology*, not the tool of *man*'s dominion over *nature*; it is the place of *intensity* where *man* and *nature* are identical as *knower* and *known*, the place of *distinction* within *unity*, the event of γνώσις. We can affirm this in virtue of the transforming power of the *hand* that makes the *act of knowledge* a transformation of both *knower* and *known*, an act of *distinction* and *identification* within the ἐν καὶ Πάν. Transformation encompasses *death* in each instant of *man*'s life and, at once, it deprives it of its *ontological* and *existential* pregnancy, as *man* ceases to be measured in the instant between his birth and his death.

¹⁷⁹ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 289.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Section 2 – The Naked Diana

Human *knowledge* passes, then, through *animality* and *mortality*. In this Bruno appears as far as possible from *modernity*, for his ideas travel beyond any anthropocentric temptation. Bruno's peculiar materialism combined with a *spiritual* – thus *material* in Bruno's sense – *intensity*, and not bearing the weight of the modern *subject*, anticipates some of Deleuze's thought. Not to mention the *rhizomatic* structure of his infinite universe that is an infinite periphery with no centre and the encounter of *man* with *nature* and *animality*, free from any categorial organization¹⁸¹. Just as human nature is defined only within the infinite vicissitude, so human knowledge, understood as *γνώσις* *i.e.* as distinguishing multiplicity within unity, is not a result of contemplation but of action, as we said earlier. Deleuze himself spots in Heraclitus the same play of identity and difference we have found in Bruno, driven by vicissitude – *becoming*, in Heraclitus' case: «Heraclitus denied the duality of worlds, “he denied being itself”. Moreover, *he made an affirmation of becoming*. In the first place it is doubtless to say that there is only becoming. No doubt it is also to affirm becoming. Heraclitus has two thoughts which are like ciphers: according to one there is no being, everything is becoming; according to the other, being is the being of becoming as such¹⁸². A working thought which affirms becoming and a contemplative thought which affirms the being of becoming. These two ways of

¹⁸¹As Bruno de-substantialises *man* by making him qualitatively similar to animals within a polycentric universe, so Deleuze and Guattari express the understanding of man in his animality by getting rid of any transcendent understanding of *man*: «Memories of a sorcerer, I. A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity. We sorcerers have always known that. It may very well be that other agencies, moreover very different from one another, have a different appraisal of the animal. One may retain or extract from the animal certain characteristics: species and genera, forms and functions, etc. [...] But we are not interested in characteristics; what interests us are modes of expansion, population, propagation, occupation, contagion, peopling. [...] What we are saying is that every animal is fundamentally a band, a pack. That it has pack modes, rather than characteristics, even if further distinctions within these modes are called for. It is at this point that the human being encounters the animal». From G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by B. Massumi, Continuum, London, pp. 239-240.

¹⁸² The same thoughts banned by Admetus as inventor of *dialogue*. See Chapter I.

thinking are inseparable, they are the thought of a single element, as Fire and Dike, as Physis and Logos. For there is no being beyond becoming, nothing beyond multiplicity; neither multiplicity nor becoming are appearances or illusions. But neither are multiple or eternal realities which would be, in turn, like essences beyond appearances. Multiplicity is the affirmation of unity; becoming is the affirmation of being. The affirmation of becoming is itself being, the affirmation of multiplicity is itself one. Multiple affirmation is the way in which the one affirms itself. “The one is the many, unity is multiplicity”¹⁸³. Deleuze is definitely not a philosopher of the Origin; thus he operates on a completely different plane with respect to Heidegger and yet, from the perspective of his philosophy of difference, he walks on the same path as Heidegger when interpreting Heraclitus, trying to capture the apparent paradox of τὰ πάντα, which Bruno revives through the materialist notion of a World Soul. It seems, then, that Bruno has a point when he holds that truth can be accessed from many different paths and he is not just advocating a sterile eclecticism. Bruno’s praise of the *hand* as «organ of organs», then, is perfectly inscribed in his ontology; the *hand* is not a tool of dominion of man over nature, it is the place of *intensity* – in virtue of its *figuration* or *composition* – that, at once, distinguishes *man* within the unity, makes the unity distinguishable to him and lets him distinguish things within the unity. The *hand* is the place of action that allows for contemplation and it could not be otherwise in a reality characterized by *vicissitude* – or *becoming*. Bruno understands, just like Heraclitus in the Heideggerian and Deleuzian interpretations, the danger of building a pure philosophical system of *identity*, which would have, otherwise, to disqualify change and experience to mere appearance and falsity. Bruno prefers to stand in the region of *truth* without creating dualisms and without recurring to any sort of dialectical movements, teleological or historical temptations that, for instance, will characterize the great Hegelian project. The λόγος is not reduced to a merely contemplative *conceptus*, as Heidegger fears when describing the Renaissance

¹⁸³ G. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, translated by H. Tomlinson, Continuum, London 2006, p. 22.

as a *renascentia romanitatis*; it is the *relational* co-determination that steers τὰ πάντα, the *vicissitudinal truth* that, at once, shapes the *knower* himself on the acting stage of γνώσις. *Identity* and *difference*, just like *being* and *becoming*, are *coessential*.

We have explored the *knower* so far, focusing on his *identity* with the *known* but then, we need to practise a parallel and contrary movement, that would take us from the *known* back to the *knower*, as *knowledge* from the point of view of *truth* still lays unexplored. Almost reflecting the vicissitudinal character of nature, Bruno's thought is itself a dynamic experience more than a monolithic system; thus we do find that some notions which appeared in his early writings and were apprehended from older traditions, successively permeate and are permeated by the development of his philosophy¹⁸⁴. That is the case of *shadows* [*umbrae*], which make their appearance in the very title of the early Latin mnemotechnic work, the *De umbris idearum*. In the *Intentio Prima* of this fundamental text, which gave Bruno international resonance and got him hired at the court of the French king, Henri III, the Nolan begins by evoking a biblical scene that appears in the Song of Songs, narrating the episode of the Sulamite who sits in the shadow of the great Jewish sage, thus escaping from the imperfect and vain shadows man is generally immersed in, in order to enjoy the direct shadow which emanates from *truth*. The Platonic root is evident but it does not exhaust the significance of the image, which acquires a new complexity:

Nevertheless, how is it possible that what is not properly true and whose essence is not properly the truth has nonetheless the effectiveness and action of truth? It is enough, then – and it is a lot – to sit in the shadow of the good and the true. In the shadow, I mean, not of the natural and rational – under this aspect one should, as a matter of fact, define as false and evil – but of the metaphysical, ideal and supra-substantial. Thus, thanks to its faculty, the soul participates in the good and in the true, and even if it does not have enough strength to be the image of that, it is nonetheless in its likeness,

¹⁸⁴ «We do not ban the mysteries of the Pythagoreans, we do not depreciate the Platonists' faith nor do we deprecate the Peripatetics' arguments, as long as they rest on a real foundation». From G. Bruno, "De umbris idearum" in G. Bruno, *Opere Mnemotecniche I*, directed by M. Ciliberto, edited by M. Matteoli, R. Sturlese, N. Tirinnanzi, Adelphi, Milano 2009, p. 36. My translation from the Latin: «Non abolemus Pythagoricum mysteria. Non parvifacimus Platoniorum fides, et quatenus reale sunt nacta fundamentum, Peripateticorum ratiocinia non despiciamus».

whereas the diaphanous crystal that is proper to the soul, limited by the opacity that is the essence of the body, experiences a vague trace of the image in man's mind, as much as the impulse can drive him to it; but in the internal senses and in reason – by which we are circumscribed, living the life of animate beings – he experiences the shadow itself.¹⁸⁵

The Platonic content and appearance of this passage should not lead us astray and the reason is not only due to what we know of Bruno's later Philosophy, which is the endorsement of a spiritualized matter and the total abandonment of any form of transcendence. The great theme of the *shadow* is not here introduced as a fundamental lack of *truth*; it is a positive characterization of *humanity* itself, a basic structure for the experience of *truth*, as the shadow is no less *true* than *truth* itself, otherwise that will result in the paradox envisaged in the question that opens the passage. Bruno proceeds to a more positive definition of *shadow*:

After having considered this, I would like you to take into account what follows, in order to distinguish the shadow from the nature of darkness.

The shadow is not darkness but the trace of darkness in light or trace of light in darkness or a participant in light and darkness or a compound of light and darkness or a mixture of light and darkness or an element that is distinct from light and darkness and separated from both. And all this not because either the truth is full of light or because it is false light or, again, because it is neither true nor false, but because it is trace of what truly or falsely is, and so on. In our treatise, let us consider it, however, a trace of light, partaking of light, not the full light.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-44. My translation from the Latin: «Qui autem fieri potest, ut ipsum, cuius esse non est proprie verum et cuius essentia non est proprie veritas, efficaciam et actum habeat veritatis? Sufficiens ergo est illi atque multum, ut sub umbra boni verique sedeat. Non inquam sub umbra veri bonique naturalis atque rationalis – hinc enim falsum diceretur atque malum –, sed metaphysici, idealis et superstantialibus. Unde boni et veri pro sua facultate particeps efficitur animus, qui est si tantum non habeat ut eius imago sit, ad eius tamen est imaginem, dum ipsius / animae diaphanum, corporis ipsius opacitate terminatum, experitur in huius mente imaginis aliquid, quatenus ad eam appulsum habet; in sensibus autem internis et ratione, in quibus animaliter vivendo versamur, umbram ipsam».

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-46. My translation from the Latin: «Hoc ipsum consideraveris, illud quoque tibi occurat velim, ut a tenebrarum ratione seiungas umbram.

Non est umbra tenebrae, sed vel tenebrarum a luce et tenebris et ab utrisque seiunctum. Et haec vel inde, quia non sit plena lucis veritas, vel quia sit falsa lux, vel quia nec vera nec falsa, sed eius, quod vere est aut flase, vestigium, etc.

Habeatur autem in proposito, ut lucis vestigium, lucis particeps, lux non plena».

In the co-penetration of light and darkness, the *shadow* finds its reality, in its *identity* and *difference* from *truth*. If the Heideggerian *clearing* [*Lichtung*] is *truth* as *openness*; the parallel between the Heideggerian *Lichtung* and the Brunian *umbra* means much more than just a similarity of images, a parallel that Sandro Mancini catches better than other critics: «Bruno distinguishes between shadow as error, which keeps away from truth, and shadow as *latency of truth*, both as the inerasable modality of the manifestation of light in the intellect of human experience, uncertain space of communication between these two polarities, and as the inexhaustible lap of the possibilities of knowledge: when, 350 years later, Heidegger will elaborate his notion of truth starting from the re-memoration of the Greeks' *a-letheia*, he will walk along the unnoticed trail of this reflection on the complementary nature of light and darkness»¹⁸⁷. Mancini's analysis is coherent with the rejection of knowledge as *contemplation*, which is another point of encounter between Heidegger and Bruno: contemplation is the total abstraction from an actual experience of *truth*, from the practice of *truth* as standing in the *clearing*, thereby witnessing that same play of concealment and unconcealment that makes *truth* itself come to the fore; standing in the *shadow* of *truth* means exactly taking part in the game of *truth* in virtue of its *concealment*. The *shadow* is the *gift* delivered through retention. The human gnosiological experience of the *shadow* lets us *distinguish* and *discriminate* the *multiplicity* within the *Unity*: the *figurations* are nothing but the World Soul casting a shadow upon itself. Γνώσις, then, is witnessing the movement of knowledge from within, which is the philosophical knowing. Each of us, as humans, distinguishes *shadows* as objects, people, planets, a tree or a car but not in their *shadowy* nature of emergence from *Unity*, from *light* through *darkness*. The adoption of an elementary

¹⁸⁷ S. Mancini, *La sfera infinita. Identità e differenza nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno*, Mimesis, Milano 2000, p. 31. My translation from the Italian: «Bruno distingue tra l'ombra come errore, che quindi allontana dalla verità, e l'ombra quale *latenza della verità*, sia in quanto ineliminabile modalità manifestativa della luce dell'intelletto nell'esperienza umana, spazio incerto di comunicazione tra questi due poli, sia in quanto grembo inesauribile delle possibilità della conoscenza: quando, 350 anni dopo, Heidegger elaborerà la sua concezione della verità a partire dalla rimemorazione dell'*a-letheia* dei Greci, riprenderà la scia inavvertita di questa riflessione sulla complementarità di luce e tenebre».

realism could definitely get us by throughout our lives and yet, at once Bruno and Heidegger seem to expose its absurdity as the very act of *distinguishing* presupposes a *unity*. A tree does not emerge on its own, as the *object* “tree”. It does not emerge in virtue of its *tree-ness* either. The tree emerges in virtue of a reciprocal determination of *knower* and *known* that *conceals* what is undistinguished in order for the tree to stand out. The tree does not stand out “in itself” but in relation to my *handling* the world that is, vice-versa, determined by the tree. Not being a pre-determined form but a co-determining figuration, the tree is a *shadow* of the totality that hides behind it. As such, we distinguish the *tree* only because the *tree* offers itself as distinguishable to the one who distinguishes it and it offers itself as a *shadow*, *i.e.* not as a metaphysically constituted object but as a *vicissitudinal* movement within τὰ πάντα. The *tree* and the *tree-knower*, through their reciprocal ontological belonging, participate in γνῶσις. The tree is a *shadow* and, were it not a *shadow*, it would not be anything at all. The *unity* cannot reveal itself *as unity*, which amounts to saying that *Being* cannot reveal itself as *Being* for it is not *a being*. *Beings* remain *shadows* because their being distinguished depends on the retention of *Being*.

If the notion of *shadow* is central in Bruno, as it is the key that gives access to the possibility of *memory* – which we shall explore in the next part of this work – it also permeates his whole *gnosiological* approach, which is, again, suggested by Bruno already in the *De umbris*, where the *shadows* are depicted as progressing to an «ever growing multiplicity, to the point of – as the Pythagoreans would have it – an infinite multiplicity»¹⁸⁸. Here the attitude is almost purely Neoplatonic, as the notion of multiplicity is interpreted as a distancing from the *unity*, as a lower hypostasis, the most corrupted and the farthest from *truth*, represented by a divine metaphysical *substratum*. We should not be fooled by Bruno’s habit of endorsing different philosophical traditions, as we have seen that, coherently with his notion of *vicissitude*, he is indeed ready to let them collapse from within. The whole of the

¹⁸⁸ G. Bruno, “De umbris idearum” in G. Bruno, *Opere Mnemotecniche I.*, p. 48. My translation from the Latin: «[...] in infinitam multitudinem – ut Pythagoreorum more loquar - progrediuntur».

Nolan philosophy is a fatal blow to all the concepts he endorses, whether Platonic, Peripatetic or scientific, in an uncompromising practice of *thinking*. The opening of the *De umbris* already showed that *shadows* are not to be dismissed as faded images of *ideas* but are to be seen as what the human can experience of *truth*. Mancini shows Bruno's twists – which earned him the scorn of many “systematic” philosophers and critics – by underlining how Bruno easily gets rid of his ancient masters' and inspirers' notions by testing them against his own thinking experience. What really suffers from his *shadowy* theory of knowledge is not the reality of nature: «Bruno opts for the shadowy nature of knowledge, as he wishes to make experience lighter and less real in order to dismantle the old image of the world and favour the construction of a new one, based on infinity and uniformity. If the conceptual edifices built by men are all shadows, then also the thick ones of the Aristotelian image of the world can, although sustained by heavy theocratic apparatuses, be swept away by the wind of the infinite»¹⁸⁹. Bruno makes use of the Neoplatonic foundations not in order to degrade material *nature* but to be able to level *nature* and *divinity*: what is considered as the upper and transcendent level of knowledge is not discarded altogether, but is conflated with the material. *Nature* is not a lower hypostasis of the *divine*; *divinity* participates in *nature* as the World Soul and the World Soul finds its expression in *Nature*. He affirms it rather explicitly in the *De Immenso*: «the species of the true, affirmed in every part, is rendered strong by the support of nature»¹⁹⁰. Further proof of the absence of a true contradiction between Bruno's Platonism and his monism, Mancini notes, is that in his very last publication, the *De imaginum*

¹⁸⁹ S. Mancini, *La sfera infinita. Identità e differenza nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno*, p. 35. My translation from the Italian: «Bruno opta per la tesi dell'umbratilità della conoscenza appunto perché vuole alleggerire l'esperienza, derealizzarla, onde rendere praticabile l'opera di smantellamento della vecchia immagine del mondo e di costruzione della nuova, imperniata sull'infinità e sull'uniformità. Se gli edifici concettuali costruiti dagli uomini sono tutti ombre, allora anche quelle spesse dell'immagine aristotelica del mondo, benché puntellate da pesanti apparati teocratici, possono essere spazzate via dal vento dell'infinito».

¹⁹⁰ G. Bruno, “De innumerabilis, immenso et infigurabili, seu de Universo et mundis”, in G. Bruno, *Opp. lat., I, II*, p. 68. My translation from the Latin: «Sic ubi naturae certo fulcimine, veri Consistit species, parteis sancita per omneis».

compositione – thus after having published his Italian works in England and his Latin poems in Frankfurt, where his turn towards monism was clear and complete – Bruno reverts, on the steps of the old *De umbris idearum*, to his former Platonic language:

Let us put the focus of the present inquiry on the concept of universe understood by the third meaning, *i.e.* as a living mirror in which the image of natural things and the shadow of the divine ones are found.

A mirror of this sort surely conceives the idea as the cause of things, in the same fashion as the image of the thing to be done in the mind of the agent assumes the trait of efficient cause.¹⁹¹

The classical definition Bruno provides of the *idea* later on in the text, as supra-substantial species of the world, in spite of the monist, pantheistic and naturalist positions adopted in the years between the *De umbris* and the *De imaginum compositione*, should not lead us astray. The apparent incoherence of this return to the Neoplatonic origins is easily overcome once we take into account the gnosiological path we have followed so far, as the meaning of *image* and *shadow* have been radically dismantled of all their transcendent referents and, from their dependence on some other-worldly truth, they have taken an active part in the very game of truth. When we examined the knowing process of a *tree*, we came to see it as a *shadow* that comes to be known as an *image* reflected by *nature* through the *knower*. The *image*, as a form of knowledge that is ordered and arranged within man's knowing faculties¹⁹², can only be achieved through the access provided by the *shadow*. The access to the supra-substantial species of the world – the world of *ideas* – is not outside *nature*¹⁹³; it is the grasping of *unity*, which is *nature* discovered in its

¹⁹¹ G. Bruno, "De imaginum compositione", in G. Bruno, *Opere Mnemotecniche II*, p. 496. My translation from the Latin: «Actum praesentis considerationis proponimus in universe iuxta tertiam <si>gnificationem, quod est veluti speculum quoddam vivens, in quod est imago rerum naturalium et umbra divinarum.

Hoc sane speculum concipit ideam tamquam causam rerum, sicut imago rei faciendae in mente efficientis imbuit efficientis rationem».

¹⁹² And we shall see its relevance in Bruno's art of memory, in Part III.

¹⁹³ As Ciliberto clearly states while commenting the *De umbris*: «In the second section, entitled *Triginta conceptus umbrarum* [...] Bruno mainly underlines the organic nexus between ideas and their shadows. It is for this very reason that man's interior world can be figured as an image of the

divine sphere and which, through the *shadows*, is made distinguishable in its *multiplicity*. There is no transcendent realm to refer to and there is no coming back to Neoplatonic hierarchies for Bruno; we can hear echoes, instead, of the Heraclitean motif we quoted from Deleuze: «multiplicity is the affirmation of unity; becoming is the affirmation of being». The quest for such *unity*, which, as humans, we can access only through *multiplicity*, will be the quest for the comprehension of the *divine*, as Ciliberto notes already in the *Spaccio*: «[...] Bruno posits the problem of the search for the “forms” of communication between God, man, nature; between superior Sophia and inferior Sophia; between Providence and Prudence. This is, actually, the Archimedean point of the “nova filosofia”. From unity, from light, springs, explicating itself in innumerable ways, the shadow; from the shadow springs the tension towards unity, towards light. Error – “crisis” on the historical level – lays in separating and juxtaposing the two plains. On the contrary, they reciprocally hold each other»¹⁹⁴.

universal dynamism, on every level. And, since there are ideas of all things – as the Nolan notes, thus questioning Plato – for man it is possible to ascend, progressively, from any interior *umbra* up to the idea from which it emanates. The art of memory Bruno aims at, then, is something very different from a mere practical tool: it is inscribed in the profound dynamism explicated by the universe, and from there it derives its foundation and legitimacy. It can be well understood, in such light, why the second part of the *De umbris* – which contains the actual art of memory – is introduced by an affirmation that confirms and restates the organic rapport that binds the world of ideas, world of shadows and mnemotechnic». From M. Ciliberto, *Umbra profunda. Studi su Giordano Bruno*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 1990, pp. 111-112. My translation from the Italian: «Nella seconda sezione, intitolata *Triginta conceptus umbrarum* – sullo sfondo di una problematica di carattere nettamente gnoseologico, in cui echeggiano I grandi testi neoplatonici, a cominciare dalle *Enneadi* plotiniane – Bruno sottolinea anzitutto il nesso organico fra le idee e le loro ombre. È per questo, infatti, che il mondo interiore dell’uomo si può configurare come un riflesso del dinamismo universale, a tutti i livelli. E dal momento che vi sono idee di tutte le cose – come il Nolano sottolinea polemizzando con Platone – per l’uomo è possibile ascendere, in modo progressivo, da qualsiasi *umbra* interiore fino a raggiungere l’idea da cui promana... L’arte della memoria cui mira Bruno, dunque, è ben altro che un semplice strumento pratico: si situa nel dinamismo profondo che si esplica nell’universo, e di qui trae il suo fondamento e la sua legittimità. S’intende bene, a questa luce, perché la seconda parte del *De umbris* – la quale racchiude l’*ars memoriae* vera e propria – si apra con un’affermazione che conferma, e ribadisce, il rapporto organico che lega mondo delle idee, mondo dell’ombra e tecnica mnemonica».

¹⁹⁴ M. Ciliberto, *Giordano Bruno*, Laterza, Bari 2007, pp. 146-147. My translation from the Italian: «[...] Bruno pone il problema della ricerca delle “forme” della comunicazione tra Dio, uomo, natura; tra Sofia superiore e Sofia inferiore; tra Provvidenza e Prudenza. Questo, in effetti, è il punto archimedeo della “nova filosofia”. Dall’unità, dalla luce scaturisce, esplicandosi in modi

The supra-sensible world envisaged in *De imaginum compositione*, the *divine* sphere, is not, then, a separate world where *ideas* dwell and provide *shadows* for the lower, human level. The *idea of tree* is not an ideal *tree-ness* that is somehow perfect if compared to all its shadows, it is the intensive belonging of the *tree* to the *unity of being*, the necessary condition for its existence in all of its shapes and vicissitudinal or temporal changes precisely *because* of its being *one* with the infinite *unity*, distinguishable but not distinguished. All of its *shadows* spring exactly from the infinite possibilities given by an undistinguished *idea*; it is supra-sensible in the sense that only *shadows*, being determinate, are accessible to the senses. We find in Bruno an irreducible tension between what is retained, the *divine*, and what is given, *shadows*: *man* is thrown in a world of *shadows* and yet, in his most philosophical afflatus, wants to grasp *divinity*. Such tension reflects *man's being-out-there* in the world, being exposed to the *open region* through the *vicissitude* of life, it is a re-edition of Heidegger's *ek-sistence* that calls the philosopher himself into question. The philosopher is not content of being exposed to the gnosiological game of *distinction*, he wants to capture the *unity*: we could say that this is Bruno's personal *Seinsfrage*. Bruno translates this tension in the most violent bond *man* ever gets to experience and that is *love*. It is of the *Heroic Frenzies* [*De gli eroici furori*] I speak, a unique text in the history of Philosophy, which addresses the primordial wish enacting the desire for knowledge, freeing it from the contemplative ropes that restrain the love and desire that originated it:

CICADA: Why is love signified through fire?

TANSILLO: I lay aside plenty of other reasons, for now let the following suffice: because in this way love turns the loved thing into the lover, as fire amongst all elements is the most active and powerful in converting all the other ones into itself.

CICADA: Go on, then.

TANSILLO: «He knows a paradise»: meaning a principal end, as paradise commonly means the end, which is distinguished in what is absolute, in truth and essence, and the

innumerabili, l'ombra; dall'ombra scaturisce la tensione all'unità, alla luce. L'errore – sul piano storico, la “crisi” – sta nel separare i due piani, nel contrapporli. Al contrario: essi si tengono reciprocamente».

other which is in similitude, shadow and participation. Of the first mode, it cannot be more than one, as the first and the ultimate good. Of the second mode, they are infinite.¹⁹⁵

In this passage from the first dialogue of the *Furori* we not only encounter the wish to access «paradise», which is the object of love, the *divine* sphere, but we are also informed that the fire of love deeply transforms the relationship between the lover and the object of love. The premise is the following: philosophy, understood as Love, has the power of changing the understanding we have of ourselves. As such, this lust for knowledge has none of the traits that characterize modern, objective pursuit of knowledge. Bruno appeals to a form of benign *fury* or *madness*, similar to the one of the *lover*, in order to render viable the quest for that knowledge that aims at *unity* as its object. On the other hand, *unity* is no object to be captured intellectually and that is why the quest for «paradise», characterized by madness and folly, overturns the terms of the loving relationship, which the *shadows* can no longer satisfy. The *shadows*, as such, represent the limit of human intellect but they do not exhaust the philosopher's effort to capture what retreats while giving, namely *Being*. Were it not for such *madness*, the hide-and-seek play of truth would never come to the fore. What we are claiming here is that we do not need to think like Heidegger or Bruno to live a decent life but we need to be “mad” to think like Heidegger and Bruno or like the Socrates depicted in the *Phaedrus*, for that matter. Philosophers force the regular proceeding of common sense in order to be able to *think*, as Ciliberto observes:

¹⁹⁵ G. Bruno, “De gli eroici furori”, in G. Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, vol. 2, pp. 534-535. My translation from the Italian:

«CICADA. – Perché l'amore è significato per il fuoco?

TANSILLO. – Lascio molte altre caggioni, bastiti per ora questa: perché cossì la cosa amata l'amore converte ne l'amante, come il fuoco tra tutti gli elementi attivissimo è potente a convertere tutti quell'altri semplici e composti in se stesso.

CICADA. – Or séguita.

TANSILLO. – “Conosce un paradiso”: cioè un fine principale, perché paradiso comunemente significa il fine, il qual si distingue in quello ch'è assoluto, in verità et essenza, e l'altro che è in similitudine, ombra e partecipazione. Del primo modo non può essere più che uno, come non è più che uno l'ultimo et il primo bene. Del secondo modo sono infiniti».

vicissitude, for Bruno, is the foundation of universal “life”, of which the restless movement of the contrary is the root and foundation. If it is so, in order to disrupt the “vicissitudinal mutation” it becomes essential to operate directly on the “contraries”, forcefully stressing the original nexus that joins intrinsically the one and the other, giving birth to “motion” and to the life of everything. [...] [Bruno: *ed.*] is perfectly conscious that, in order to obtain such extraordinary results, it is necessary to break the equilibrium, the harmony, pushing the opposition to the limit – disequilibrium, disharmony, contrariety – thus operating a true “suspension” of “motion”, of “time”, of “life”. In this sense the furious’ experience is structurally – and technically, one could say – an “apocalyptic” experience; and it is, in a full sense – and consequently – a direct and explicit confrontation with death, if death is suspension of “motion”, “time” and “life”.¹⁹⁶

In other words, the philosopher, in order to think, has to suspend the world understood as *extensive*, with its duration and size; but that is an enterprise for madmen. The experience of love as madness amounts to experiencing the *indifference* of the world by reaching an unprecedented level of *intensity*, it amounts to merging with the *origin*. Such an experience has the traits of primordial innocence and animality and it recalls the Orphic myths of Dionysus devoured by the Titans, incinerated by Zeus, from whose smoke – *i.e.* from the union of the divinity and the savage beasts – man is born. Facing death is nothing but a return to the *origin* and returning to the *origin* amounts to experiencing *unity*. Bruno is well aware that this is impossible but his uncompromising philosophical quest obliges him to embrace this extreme tension because that is what being a philosopher is about.

In the fourth dialogue of the *Furori* Bruno revisits the myth of the hunter Actaeon who, searching for Diana, finds her naked and, overcome by that prohibited and divine sight, is devoured by his own dogs:

¹⁹⁶ M. Ciliberto, *L'occhio di Atteone*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 2002, p. 48. My translation from the Italian: «[...] la vicissitudine, per Bruno, è il fondamento della ‘vita’ universale, di cui il movimento continuo dei contrari è, a sua volta, radice e fondamento. Se così è, per incrinare la ‘mutazione vicissitudinale’ diventa indispensabile operare, direttamente, sui “contrari”, tenendo al massimo il nesso originario che congiunge, intrinsecamente, l’uno all’altro, dando origine al ‘moto’ – e alla vita di ogni cosa. [...] [Bruno: *ed.*] è pienamente consapevole che, per ottenere questo risultato straordinario, è necessario rompere l’equilibrio, l’armonia, forzando al massimo l’opposizione – lo squilibrio, la disarmonia, la contrarietà –, operando una vera e propria ‘sospensione’ del ‘moto’, del ‘tempo’, della ‘vita’. In questo senso, quella del furioso è strutturalmente – e tecnicamente verrebbe da dire – una esperienza di tipo ‘apocalittico’; ed è, in modo compiuto – e conseguentemente –, un confronto diretto, esplicito, con la morte, se morte è sospensione del ‘moto’, del ‘tempo’, della ‘vita’».

TANSILLO: You know well that the intellect apprehends things intelligibly, *i.e.* according to its own way; whereas the will pursues things naturally, thus according to the way they are in themselves. Therefore, Actaeon with such thoughts, those dogs that were looking for goodness, wisdom, beauty, the prey of the woods, outside of themselves and in such way got to their presence, captured by such beauty, outside of himself, became the prey, saw himself turned into what he was looking for; and he realized that he had himself become the desired prey of his own dogs, of his own thoughts, as having contracted it in himself, there was no need to look for divinity outside of himself.¹⁹⁷

The will, which is desire, lust or love, is supposed to discover the unbearable sight, the *naked Diana*, the unsustainable object of love, which corresponds to the transformation of the hunter into the longed for prey: Actaeon, finding the *naked Diana*, finds *nature unconcealed*, which amounts to saying that he himself is the *divinity* omnipresent within *nature* and in its *animality* – as he gets devoured by his own dogs, just like the Titans devour young Dionysus in the Orphic myth. Actaeon finds *nature* only *as nature*, thereby exasperating the tension between the *animal* and the *divine* through the fury of desire. Bruno is conscious that the ultimate *knowing* moment that goes beyond the *shadow* or the game of *a-letheia* is, indeed, apocalyptic and implies the total loss of the individual. Bruno chooses to push the quest for knowledge to the limit not because he is looking to destroy the *human*, as such, but to make the *human* protagonist of his own anthropogenesis by acquiring the consciousness of his intimate belonging not only to the animal world but also to the divine one, precisely his intimacy with the *naked Diana*, *nature*¹⁹⁸. *Nature*,

¹⁹⁷ G. Bruno, “De gli eroici furori”, in G. Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, vol. 2, p. 578. My translation from the Italian: «TANSILLO. – Sai bene che l’intelletto apprende le cose intellegibilmente, idest secondo il suo modo; e la volontà perseguita le cose naturalmente, cioè secondo la raggione con la quale sono in sé. Cossì Atteone con que’ pensieri, que’ cani che cercavano estra di sé il bene, la sapienza, la beltade, la fiera boscareccia, et in quel modo che giunse alla presenza di quella, rapito fuor di sé da tanta bellezza, dovenne preda, veddesi convertito in quel che cercava; e s’accorse che de gli suoi cani, de gli suoi pensieri egli medesimo venea ad essere la bramata preda, perché già avendola contratta in sé, non era necessario di cercare fuor di sé la divinità».

¹⁹⁸ «The “vicious” character of the heroic fury resides precisely within the permanent possibility of the extreme, *i.e.* in the possibility of making the limits inherent to the constitution of human nature, burst. Fury designates thus the “excess” of human power – the possibility that is to open itself up to the infinite. This openness of human power to the infinite is characterized by a double register: on one hand, human nature fully belongs to the order of infinite nature, to the incessant rhythm of

understood outside of all its determinations, is the ultimate experience of γνῶσις; it is standing face to face with *Being*. Nevertheless, as we said in the previous chapter, the philosopher can only practise *gnosiology*; he cannot experience γνῶσις as a moment of pure *intensity* unless he is annihilated just like Actaeon. Bruno's move is twofold: on the one hand, he is inviting us to take the risk and pursue *nature* in its *unity*; on the other hand, he is telling us this is madness, for he knows that the thought of *multiplicity* has to be kept in order not to lose oneself. It is the tension between the wise and the furious that interests him; he does not wish to replicate Actaeon and be devoured by his own dogs, so he needs to hold onto the thought of *extension* and the thought of *intensity* at once, which is the failed enterprise of Admetus we encountered in Chapter I. David Farrell Krell spots a similar attitude in Heidegger, who mistrusts the lust for vision, typical of metaphysics: «Yet Heidegger's reference to vision is now compelled to become part of the *destructuring of the ontological tradition*, insofar as the tradition is enslaved by the "desire to see". Heidegger cites the opening words of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: *Pantes anthropoi tou eidenaioregontai physei*, which he paraphrases as follows: the human being is shaped by the "care" of sight – the *orexis*, the prevailing *will* (in Nietzsche's sense) or passion, to see. Heidegger also identifies it with *noein*, the purely intuitive apprehending that constitutes "the fundament of Occidental philosophy from Parmenides through Hegel"»¹⁹⁹.

metamorphoses; on the other hand, such nature is "free" to invent and to create "new orders" in the infinite. Such freedom precisely explains the power of the heroic fury: the excess and the vice of the furious represent the proof that human nature can open up to the infinite and act upon it». From S. Ansaldi, *Giordano Bruno. Une philosophie de la métamorphose*, p.165. My translation from French: «Le caractère 'vicieux' de la fureur héroïque réside précisément dans cette possibilité permanente de l'extrême, c'est-à-dire dans la possibilité de faire éclater les limites inhérentes à la constitution de la nature humaine. La fureur désigne ainsi la 'démésure' de la puissance humaine – la possibilité qui est la sienne de s'ouvrir aux variations de l'infini. Cette ouverture de la puissance humaine à l'infini relève d'un double registre : d'une part, la nature humaine appartient pleinement à l'ordre de la nature infinie, au rythme incessant de ses métamorphoses ; de l'autre, cette nature est 'libre' d'inventer et de créer des 'ordres nouveaux' dans l'infini. Cette liberté explique précisément la puissance de la fureur héroïque : l'excès et le vice du furieux représentent la preuve que la nature humaine peut s'ouvrir à l'infini et agir en lui».

¹⁹⁹ D. Farrell Krell, *Intimations of Mortality. Time, Truth and Finitude in Heidegger's Thinking of Being* [1986], Penn State Press, University Park 1991, p. 86. Also, Krell adds just below: «As further testimony sharing the passion to see, which binds the most exalted *theoria* in the meanest

Metaphysical thinking wishes to hold the truth of *nature* in one gaze; therefore it refuses to accept the *latency* of the truth. Bruno, on the other hand, understands that there is nothing “pure”; he is fully immersed in the vicissitudinal and extensive dimension of *nature*, yet he strives not to abstract such vicissitude but to give it the life that can only spring from *unity*. That is the greatest aspiration of Renaissance man: as Giovanni Gentile affirms, in Renaissance culture «the *human* point of view becomes the point of view of *nature* or of the cosmos [...]»²⁰⁰.

ogging of curiosity mongers, and which Sartre so enticingly analyses as the Actaeon Complex (*Being and Nothingness*, IV, 2, ii), Heidegger introduces Augustine’s account of *concupiscentia oculorum* (*Confessiones* X, 35; SZ, 171)». From *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ G. Gentile, *Il carattere del Rinascimento*, in G. Gentile, *Il pensiero italiano del Rinascimento*, Sansoni, Firenze 1968, p. 18. My translation from the Italian: «Il punto di vista *umano* diventa punto di vista *naturale* o cosmico [...]».

Chapter VI – Another kind of knowledge

Section 1 – Particular things and the essence of knowing

Unity and *multiplicity* have been guiding our analysis throughout Heidegger's and Bruno's *gnosiology*, which, although characterized by different geneses, have led us to a common path. The former, in his encounter with Heraclitus, ties the *ontological* character of *truth* as *unconcealment* to the *distinguishing* of the *undistinguished* totality, whereas the latter extrapolates the necessary latency of truth from the spiritual materialism which, within the perspective of *infinity*, makes our knowledge of things an experience of *shadows* captured within a totality. In both cases knowledge is liberated from any sort of *objectivity* that forces things into a scientifically determined *essence*, severed from the rest of reality. We would like to show that Spinoza, again, through different routes, comes to very similar conclusions. The different methods that characterize the three authors are not an obstacle, first of all because they do not posit *method* itself as the arbitrary parameter for the determination of *Being*; in other words, they are profoundly distinct from Cartesianism and from the general premises of *modernity* as we know it. Descartes, as we said earlier, sets the *ontological* problem on *epistemological* bases and proceeds on this latter track, as he feels secured by the presence of the *subject*. Heidegger harshly criticises this setting, while Bruno and Spinoza actively proceed on alternative routes that make *gnosiology* not a separated philosophical practice but a discourse that runs in parallel and with equal dignity in respect to their *ontology*.

We left Spinoza in Chapter III by affirming that the *modes*, which characterize our everyday experience, are the «tip of the iceberg», which is another way to say that they are inscribed in a number of relations and practices, through which they are identified as such. This, in turn, implies that they are not *really* distinguished inasmuch as *real distinctions* only pertain to *attributes*. In order to address the

problem of *knowledge* in Spinoza, then, we should look more closely at the relation between the *essence* of particular things and how we come to know them. The importance of starting from particular things lies in the fact that knowledge in Spinoza – just as in Bruno – is not oriented towards *universals*. These latter are, at best, considered as *entia rationis* and abstractions. Particular things and our understanding of them give us an understanding of God itself, as Spinoza affirms explicitly towards the end of the *Ethics* (Prop. 24, Part V):

The more we understand particular things, the more we understand God.
Proof This is evident from Cor. Pr. 25, I.²⁰¹

It is evident that such an affirmation runs against any traditional view of God, who is understood as transcendent and therefore cannot be in any way known through the encounter with particular things (with the poetical exception, maybe, of Saint Francis' mystical experience of God's creatures). The reason, of course, lies in Spinoza's ontology and, in particular, in the Corollary he is referring to (Prop. 25, Part I):

Corollary Particular things are nothing but affections of the attributes of God, that is, modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way. The proof is obvious from Pr. 15 and Def. 5.²⁰²

In other words, particular things are God himself, understood as determinate. God – who, by *Def. 6, Part I* is *Substance* – nevertheless, is *infinite* and, as every determination is a limitation, he cannot be understood as determinate. Thus we are facing, once more, the issue of *unity* and *multiplicity* that need to be thought together. If God is to be understood through *particular things*, then we are facing once more the challenge of γνῶσις: *distinguishing* what is, by definition, absolute and undistinguished. As we partially examined in Chapter III, the *difference* between *substance* and *modes* lies in the *necessity* of their *existence*, which is entailed in the

²⁰¹ B. Spinoza, "Ethics", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 374.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 232.

case of *substance* and is not in the case of *modes*. What we should investigate, then, is how we, from a *modal* perspective in which we are fully immersed, come to an understanding of God. That will give us an account of our knowing faculties within the dual thought of *unity* and *multiplicity*. As we saw in our encounter with Bruno, such dual thought is difficult to hold together unless we bend our common sense perspective. Any *thinking* that is generated from a *modal* and thus *extensive* point of view needs to be understood by its *intensive* counterpart. It should not be mistaken for a dialectic, as holding these two thoughts together means that we are talking of the same thing understood differently and not of a *subject* and an *object*. Understanding God through particular things means nothing more than understanding the *Being* of *beings*: Spinoza thinks that, in order to get to an understanding of *substance*, we should change our understanding of *modes*.

When Spinoza affirms that the *essence* of the *modes* does not entail *existence*, he is not making a merely logical point. He is saying, rather, that they are real only insofar as they inhere in *substance*, which is the only reality that there can be. Whether we are talking of an *idea* – mode of thought – or of a body – mode of extension – their *existence* is unnecessary and does not cause the *essence* to be or not to be. The apparent Platonic structure of such an affirmation is easily dismissed: by “existing mode” we do not mean some sort of lower kind of existence, diminished by the corruptibility and volubility of the *mode*. Indeed, the *mode* is corruptible, unstable and changeable, but that is the only kind of existence there can possibly be. This entails that the *essence* is not a higher form of *existence*, some sort of *ιδέα* or *οὐσία*; although it does not get corrupted nor suffer instability, *essence* is nothing like an ideal or perfect version of the *mode*. It cannot get corrupted or be unstable simply because it is not subject to the determinations of change. The *essence* is the mode understood as *intensive*. Again, just like in Heidegger and Bruno, *essence* is what is “kept in safety”. Proposition 22, *V*, in this sense, is crucial:

Nevertheless, there is necessarily in God an idea which expresses the essence of this or that human body under a form of eternity [*sub specie aeternitatis*]

Proof God is the cause not only of the existence of this or that human body but also of its essence (Pr. 25, I) which must therefore necessarily be received through God's essence (Ax. 4, I) by a certain eternal necessity (Pr. 16, I), and this conception must necessarily be in God.²⁰³

We must not forget that, whenever we are talking of *eternity*, we are not thinking of an infinite series of seconds, hours, days or centuries. We learned this from Bruno. Therefore, if we are conceiving a *body sub specie aeternitatis*, we are not talking of an ever existing body. Nadler, although less hasty than his colleagues Bennet²⁰⁴ and Curley²⁰⁵, cannot fully capture the sense of this and he does not go far enough: «Now, the essence of a body as an extended mode is in God (or Substance) under the attribute of Extension. It is “eminently” contained within Extension as one of its infinite potentialities or possible generations. It is, in other words, just one out of infinitely many ways of being extended, and thus belongs as an eternal finite mode within Extension's immediate infinite mode»²⁰⁶. The reduction of essences to mere logical possibility is simply not contemplated in Spinoza, for whom *substance* is the only possible world. It is simply absurd to think of essences as possibilities for generations from a perspective of eternity, where numerical distinctions are not contemplated, something that Nadler himself recognizes: «True eternity, which Spinoza explicitly contrasts with sempiternity (in ID8) stands outside of all temporal categories whatsoever. ‘Before’, ‘after’, ‘now’, ‘later’ and all such ascriptions are

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

²⁰⁴ «I don't think that the final three doctrines [of Part Five] can be rescued. The only attempts at complete salvage I have encountered have been unintelligible to me and poorly related to what Spinoza actually wrote...After three centuries of failure to profit from it, the time has come to admit that this part of the *Ethics* has nothing to teach us and is pretty certainly worthless...this material is valueless». From J. Bennet, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, pp. 357, 372. Quoted in S. Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics. An Introduction*, p. 260.

²⁰⁵ «Another, more equanimous scholar insists that “in spite of many years of study, I still do not feel that I understand this part of the *Ethics* at all”. He adds, «I feel the freedom to confess that, of course, because I also believe that no one else understands it adequately either”». From S. Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics. An Introduction*, p. 260.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

completely inapplicable to what is eternal»²⁰⁷. Possibilities, however infinite, are a countable and numerical perspective and are ontologically out of place when dealing with *modal essence*. Nadler does not fully endorse the perspective of the *infinite* and keeps reasoning from a purely *extensive* point of view. Genevieve Lloyd confirms this view by definitely excluding the notion of possibility from the sphere of *essences*: «‘Contingency’, in the use Spinoza gives it here, relates to essence; and ‘possibility’ relates to causes – to the position of the thing in the interconnected system of modes. The contingent is that for which – attending to its essence – we find nothing which either necessarily ‘posits’ its existence or necessarily ‘excludes’ it. The ‘possible’ is that for which – attending to the causes from which it must be produced – we are given no knowledge of whether or not the causes are determined to produce it (IVD3 and IVD4)»²⁰⁸.

Having excluded some potential ambiguities from the field of *essence*, we can finally address the problem of *knowledge*. We should try first to set a firm gnosiological ground starting from *essences*. Coherently with the Heraclitean ground extracted from Heidegger, we are dealing, as a matter of fact, with a *gnosiological* problem, which is concerned with the *distinction* of particulars within τὰ πάντα with respect to *essences*. Thus, unless we abandon the perspective of numerical and logical distinction, a paradox will keep on haunting our thoughts. We can see why in Bruno particular things are only known as *shadows*, not because they are somehow imperfect in comparison to a Platonic form but because that is the only possible account of an extensively constituted, and thus numerically interpretable, world. As *things* assume different configurations, whose reality is thereby not that of a fixed and transcendent nature, they are subject to an omni-relational existence. Nevertheless, their belonging to the *unity* of the One, a belonging that was defined as *World Soul* and characterized as *intensive*, is devoid of extension and calculability, so much so that the only access to the «naked Diana» – *nature* as *One* – happens

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

²⁰⁸ G. Lloyd, *Spinoza and the Ethics* [1996], Routledge, London 2007, p. 86.

through a furious and insane *passion* of love. In Spinoza the issue, although approached differently, leads to similar conclusions: *essences* are not only *caused* by God but must «necessarily be received through God's essence (Ax. 4, I) by a certain eternal necessity (Pr. 16, I), and this conception must necessarily be in God» as Spinoza said above about the *essence* of that human body. That is the reason why the understanding of particular things and of their *essences*, contained in the idea of God, provides us with an understanding of God. We are to comprehend how this can happen, *essences* as such not being distinguishable from one another, not even as possibilities of existence, from our *modal* point of view. Deleuze affirms, as a matter of fact, «*Distinction, then, is taken in the sense of extrinsic distinction*. The argument is as follows. Modal essences are contained in their attribute; as long as a mode does not exist, no extrinsic distinction between its essence, and other essences, is possible. Thus no idea can represent or apprehend modal essences as extrinsic parts of the attribute, or as parts external to one another»²⁰⁹. Deleuze, drawing on Duns Scotus, claims that *essences* are to be distinguished in quantitative terms of *intensity* or *power*: «It is in this sense, as we have already seen, that modes of a divine attribute necessarily participate in God's power: their essence is itself part of God's power, is an intensive part, or a degree of that power»²¹⁰. Deleuze's interpretation is not only more acceptable than Nadler's but it makes perfect sense, as it provides a kind of distinction which is not numerical and is thus coherent with Spinoza's equation between *essence* and *power* in Part I, Prop. 34, of the *Ethics*:

God's power is his very essence.

Proof From the sole necessity of God's essence it follows that God is self-caused (Pr. 11) and the cause of all things (Pr. 16 and Cor.). Therefore, God's power, whereby he and all things are and act, is his very essence.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ G. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, pp. 195-196.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

²¹¹ B. Spinoza, "Ethics", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 238.

If particular *essences* are degrees of God's *power*, thus of God's *essence*, understanding particular *essences* implies understanding God's *power*, and thus his *essence*. God is infinitely powerful because he is *causa sui* [cause of himself] and thus cause of all things (τὰ πάντα). Therefore particular things are powerful to the extent that they can causally affect other things. The fact that such power is only expressed in existence does not prevent *essences* from being *sub specie aeternitatis* but not as Platonic forms. As a matter of fact, when someone dies or when a house is burnt down, their essences are eternal not because their idea is fixed somewhere else but because, from the point of view of *aeternitas*, they do not exist in a particular duration or dimension. We could not even properly speak in terms of present, future and past, as such categories are meaningless from the point of view of eternity: the Punic Wars and the French Revolution, from the point of view of *substance*, are simply its own affections and are not historically or temporally ordered. The power of such events, their *essence*, is not limited to their happening; it causes us to study and somehow remember them as much as it causally influences our actual geographical and cultural boundaries, political institutions and thinking. This implies something really important: when we refer to the Punic Wars or the French Revolution, we could not possibly refer to them in their existence, as we could not possibly have experienced them. Furthermore, not even Scipio Africanus or Robespierre, who have lived those events from two particular perspectives, could possibly refer to them in their existence. The conclusion is that we cannot talk of the Punic Wars or the French Revolution, which do not *exist* as such. We are being affected by their *power*, which is being expressed and is not inscribed in time as *duration*. This does not amount to denying that those events ever happened; they did happen, but in their actual modal existence they are something really different from whatever I, a historian, Scipio or Robespierre could have said or experienced. What we said in chapter I about Fellini and the Romans fits exactly in this perspective. Fellini is a great artist, for he is affected by the *power* of the Romans – their *essence* – but he is also aware of such *power*. In virtue of this he renounces any temptation of describing the Romans as

they allegedly were. His artistic *power* affects and is the constitutive cause of the Romans represented in his *Satyricon*. Not only has the *essence* of the Romans caused Fellini to recreate a world through Petronius Arbiter's text, it is Fellini's *essence* as an artist that empowered him to affect the very idea we have of the Romans. Were it not so *powerful*, the movie would have fallen into oblivion. What is powerful holds sway and is *remembered* but it is also kept in safety. Fellini is affected by a people, the Romans, that he has not encountered and whose *essence* is expressed through his recollection of them. The *essence* of the Romans belongs to an *undistinguished unity*, therefore it is preserved and concealed. Yet, it is concealed behind the power it has on us, as we are being affected by the many expressions of what we consider "the Romans". Spinoza's γνώσις is characterized by a kind of *distinguishing* that is distinction of *essences*, which are degrees of God's *power*. From the modal perspective, *essence* as *intensity of power* finds its only expression in the world of *extension*, which is the only one that exists, just as in Bruno *intensity* is expressed in the *extensive* configuration of things, which allows, for instance, *man* to master other beings through the use of his hand. Once more it is necessary to hold Admetus' two thoughts at once: we are not presented with two parallel worlds, *essence* and *existence*, as the reality we live in is all that exists.

If we were to extend our discourse on *science*, then, we would have to interrogate Heidegger's notion of the *essence of knowing*, which we addressed in Chapter IV. In the *Rektoratsrede*, Heidegger draws his critique of the modern interpretation of τέχνη back to this fundamental issue: the Aeschylean saying that *knowing is far weaker than necessity*. The saying expresses the original sense of *knowing*, which does not contemplate the *subject* as the active *substratum* from which *knowledge* acquires its legitimacy but the centre of intensity on which *knowledge* comes to be practised as «the power that hones and embraces *Dasein* in its entirety»²¹². As we saw, Heidegger frames the Aeschylean saying in terms of *power*:

²¹² M. Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University", in *Philosophical and Political Writings*, p. 4. See Chapter IV, Section 1.

«This is to say: all knowing about things has always been delivered up to overpowering fate and fails before it»²¹³. Fate is *overpowering*, so much so as to embrace *Dasein* in its entirety and not in its historical and metaphysical form as *subject*. *Dasein* comes to exist through the necessity of the world it is thrown in and knowledge is subordinated to such necessity. The implications of such a view are vital in order to build a theory of knowledge that is not founded upon «calculation» and «machination», thereby reducing things to mere, isolated *objects*. If Heidegger exposes the *essence of knowing* in terms of *power*, then, that is a viable alternative to a mathematically, thus numerically and analytically based, theory of knowledge. As was illustrated above, though, Spinoza offers a valid anticipation of Heidegger's path. As a matter of fact, it should not surprise us if in an early text such as the *Short Treatise* Spinoza already affirms:

[...] it is never we who affirm or deny something of a thing, but it is the thing itself that affirms or denies, in us, something of itself.²¹⁴

This is the precise negation of any subjectivist stance on knowledge: there is no *subject* functioning as an ontological substratum but as particular things affecting us through their *essence*, that is, their *power*. In the case of Heidegger, then, two aspects become clearer: the *essence of science* as *technology* reveals itself as a great centre of *intensity*, so powerful as to drive the whole Western tradition and its pervasive influence upon the rest of the world; such an *essence* has to be looked for at its *origin*, not in virtue of the ancients' authority but in virtue of the understanding of such a *power* that has given rise to the great metaphysical tradition and therefore to modern science. The claim that the *essence of science is technology*, then, is perfectly coherent with this framework: more precisely, and more correctly, *technology* is the expression of that *power* that has guaranteed the Western tradition a cultural and

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ B. Spinoza, "Short Treatise on God, Man and his Well-Being", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 82.

material dominion upon the rest of the world. Therefore we experience the *essence of knowing* expressed as *technology*: we could not possibly experience such an *essence* if not by the expression of its *power*. The retrospective look to the Greeks for an understanding of the *essence of technology* reveals, then, the *power* of the *origin* but it also opens up a new perspective on the *origin* itself. The mnemonic exercise of going back to the *origin* stops, once and for all, being characterized as a temporal and historical one – we said *power* cannot be characterized by *duration* but only by *intensity* – and thus it is not the recovery of a particular event in history or a revival of Greek culture. Our *extensive* practices, such as the philological and historical ones, are mere tools and cannot define the *origin* as such. Heidegger's quest is oriented, instead, towards the understanding of the *end of philosophy as metaphysics* by *thinking* the crisis of a *power* that is present under some form of *eternity*. Now, even Heidegger's notion of memory makes much better sense: «Memory, in the sense of human thinking that recalls, dwells where everything that gives food for thought is kept in safety»²¹⁵. It is, then, *essence* that gives food for thought, «harbours» and «conceals» it but «“Keeping” alone gives freely what is to-be-thought, what is most thought-provoking, it frees it *as a gift*»²¹⁶. It is the game of ἀλήθεια, *truth* that gives through unconcealment but that is in need of *keeping concealed*, which is another way of saying that *Being* is the place of *essences* and has to remain hidden because it could not be otherwise; it is only to be expressed in the realm of *beings*, because that is all there is.

Spinoza, just like Bruno, shows himself to be more confident with the dual thought that is required by *thinking* than Heidegger imagined and very far from the «peculiar one-sidedness» that was ascribed to him.

²¹⁵ M. Heidegger, *What is called Thinking?*, pp. 150-151.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Section 2 – Adequacy

We have explored particular *essences* and addressed their being *sub specie aeternitatis*, thus their *Being* understood through God. Such discourse, nevertheless, would not acquire any value at all if we did not also address the realm of *existence*, which is what we actually experience and within which we are undertaking our thinking effort, that of holding two thoughts at once. Most people are perfectly content with everyday *extensive* and abstract categories such as *duration* and *measurement*; those are the categories that allow us to thrive in the modern world, those are the tools through which metaphysics has made the world easier to *think*, manageable and predictable. That is Admetus' realm of dialogue, where the dialectic of conflicting opinions ascribes the same value to all. Such is the reduction operated by metaphysics, with its extraordinary results achieved by modern science and technology. We saw that Heidegger has forced this reading upon the whole history of metaphysics but we found in pre-Cartesian Bruno and in post-Cartesian Spinoza a different approach that is uncompromisingly philosophical and not subject to the needs of modern science and actually appreciative of it. In Bruno, the point of encounter between what he called ideas – yet devoid of any Platonic remnant – and *man* was the realm of *shadows*. Such an organization of knowledge allows Bruno to hold onto the everyday experiences of the world, yet saving them from the objectification operated by the human mind, de-realizing them as much as it is necessary to save experience and, at the same time, rooting them in the ever-changing vicissitude of the One. In Spinoza we saw how *essences* of particular things are degrees of God's *power*, meaning they are contained in God's own *essence*, a *power* that allows it to be *causa sui*, a prerogative that is not granted to its modes. *Essence* is obviously the *power* to *affect* and to *be affected*. In Chapter III we affirmed that *modes* are the «tip of an iceberg»: this means that if a mode such as a chair is not to be considered as an *object* but as an *affection* of *substance*, it is not its “chairness” that makes it such nor any particular and unique features. The “iceberg” that

underlies the *chair* is not only the wood and straw or the iron that it is made of, but also the space and role it occupies in a kitchen or in an office; it is the use made of it, the culture that, instead of sitting on the floor, prescribes sitting on chairs and the innumerable causes and practices that it is inscribed in. Its *essence* is its affirmation as a chair within *substance*, its *power* to establish itself amongst other affections. Therefore, an adequate *knowledge* of the chair has very little to do with a chart of its design features such as its size, colour and shape, although they too are affections of the chair itself.

Keeping in mind our example of the chair, then, we should approach the problem of *knowledge* in Spinoza by casting aside any temptation of adopting an objectified view of what is to be *known*. We should not forget that, as *knowers*, we are ourselves *affections*, and thus *modes of substance*, as much as our chair, where our *mind* is simply the *idea* of our *body* (Pr. 13, Part II of the Ethics):

The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, *i.e.* a definite mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else.

[...]

Corollary Hence it follows that man consists of mind and body, and the human body exists as we sense it.²¹⁷

As no causal interaction is possible between *mind* and *body*, it is obvious that the *mind* cannot affect the body or somehow order it to do anything or vice versa. As we said when we talked of *attributes* in Chapter III, *mind* and *body* are *substance* seen under different perspectives. That is the reason that makes it absurd for them to interact causally with each other because they are not different things, as any *affection* of the body corresponds to an affection of the *mind*. As Deleuze puts it: «What we call an “object” is only the effect an object has on our body; what we call “me” is only the idea we have of our own body and our soul insofar as they suffer an effect. The given here appears as the most intimate and vital as well as the most confused relation between our knowledge of bodies, our knowledge of our own body

²¹⁷ B. Spinoza, “Ethics”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 251.

and our knowledge of ourselves»²¹⁸. As any other mode, just like the chair, man is inscribed in a great number of relations but the issue gets increasingly complicated by the fact that a *mind* is the idea of the *body* not as a detailed description of bodily parts and organs but in virtue of what affects it. Furthermore, those bodily affections are the way to the formulation of ideas about the world. If a man sits on a chair, he is thus affected by it and formulates an idea of a “chair” roughly as “something to sit on”. That could be sufficient to get by but surely for Spinoza that is not an *adequate idea*. In a world characterized by *affects* – which affect *affections* – we find ourselves involved and affected in different ways, so that our *mind*, just as our *body*, does not function as an input-output machine or black box; it affects and it is reciprocally affected by the world. If the mind were something along the line of Hilary Putnam’s *brain in a vat*, the very necessity of a world for it would disappear but so would the brain and the mind themselves. Let us hear what Spinoza has to say about it (Pr. 1, Part III of the *Ethics*):

Our mind is in some instances active and in other instances passive. Insofar as it has adequate ideas, it is necessarily active; insofar as it has inadequate ideas, it is necessarily passive.

Proof In every human mind, some of its ideas are adequate, others are fragmentary and confused (Sch. Pr. 40, II). Now ideas that are adequate in someone’s mind are adequate in God insofar as he constitutes the essence of that mind (Cor. Pr. 11, II); and furthermore those ideas that are inadequate in the mind are also adequate in God (same Cor.), not insofar as he contains in himself the essence of that mind only, but insofar as he contains the minds of other things as well. [...] ²¹⁹

Inadequate ideas are our primary understanding of the world, the fundamental *images*, as *ideas* in our *mind* – corresponding to our bodies being *causally affected* by other bodies they are involved with. Says Lloyd: «As long as the human body is affected, the mind will have an idea of an actually existing external body. Our bodies retain the traces of the changes brought about on their surfaces by the impinging of other bodies. So the mind will again regard external bodies as present, even when

²¹⁸ G. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, p. 146.

²¹⁹ B. Spinoza, “Ethics”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 279.

they no longer exist (IIP17D & C). [...] These affections of the body whose ideas present external bodies as present to us are Spinoza's version of "images"; and the mind's regarding bodies in this way is his version of imagining. These imaginings are not themselves a source of error. Error arises from the fact they can occur unaccompanied by other ideas which 'exclude from existence' the non-existent things imagined as present»²²⁰. *Inadequacy* is akin to the Heideggerian *presence-at-hand*, which is a basic structure of existence from an *ontic* point of view; in *gnosiological* terms they are a condition of the *knower* with respect to the *known*, that represents things as *present*. As Lloyd affirms, this is not, in itself, a source of *error*, although she does not explain the reason: they are not a source of error because in Spinoza no notion of *truth* as *correctness* can be found, thus there is no standard to correspond to. Such a notion is absolutely foreign to the concept of *adequacy*.

Knowing things as merely present, as «fragmentary and confused» *images* corresponds to the *first kind of knowledge*²²¹. Their being «fragmentary and confused» does not amount to their being *wrong*. Their being somehow *false* is not due to a lack of *correspondence* but to a condition of scarcity and privation of knowledge²²². If we think of Heidegger's *Lichtung* and Bruno's shadows, we shall see that the *first kind of knowledge* is also characterized by the *latency of truth*. Human knowing, in its everyday immediacy, relies on what is offered to the imagination. Images, conceived as «those affections of the human body the ideas of which set forth external bodies as if they were present to us»²²³, do provide us with an understanding of the world that is not negative as such. What we distinguish as

²²⁰ G. Lloyd, *Spinoza and the Ethics*, p. 56.

²²¹ «1. From individual objects presented to us through the senses in a fragmentary [*mutilate*] and confused manner without any intellectual order (See Cor. Pr. 29, II); and therefore I call such perceptions "knowledge from causal experience".

2. From symbols. For example, from having heard or read certain words we call a thing to mind and we form certain ideas of them similar to those through which we imagine things (Sch. Pr. 18, II).

Both these ways of regarding things I shall in future refer to as "knowledge of the first kind", "opinion" or "imagination"». From B. Spinoza, "Ethics", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 267.

²²² «Falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate ideas, that is, fragmentary and confused ideas, involve». From B. Spinoza, "Ethics" (Pr. 35, Part II), in *ibid.*, p. 323.

²²³ B. Spinoza, "Ethics", Scholium, Pr. 17, Part II in *ibid.*, p.279.

images is given as a defined and determined object. Nevertheless, we know that modes are not isolated *objects* but are *affections* constituted by their own affecting other things and their being affected, *i.e.* their *power* or *essence*. Such *essence* is exactly what is denied and hidden in the imagination. The ignorance of such concealment is what constitutes the condition called the *first kind of knowledge*. As a matter of fact, Spinoza notes:

[...] to begin my analysis of error, I should like you to note that the imaginations of the mind, looked at in themselves, contain no error; *i.e.* the mind does not err from the fact that it imagines, but only insofar as it is considered to lack the idea which excludes the existence of those things which it imagines to be present to itself. For if the mind, in imagining nonexistent things to be present to it, knew at the same time that those things did not exist in fact, it would surely impute this power of imagining not to the defect but to the strength of its own nature, especially if this faculty were to depend solely on its own nature; that is (Def. 7, I), if this faculty of imagining were free.²²⁴

At first sight there is nothing particularly interesting in Spinoza's statement: if I imagine my grandmother dining with me, my grandmother being dead, the adequacy of such an image, and thus my being crazy or perfectly rational, will depend entirely on the idea of her death. If I understand what *causes* my mind to imagine my granny – nostalgia or sadness, for instance – dining with me and if I understand what makes it impossible for her to dine with me at present – her death – then my mind is powerful enough to bear such a thought. Nevertheless, that is a very abstract reading of Spinoza, a purely commonsensical mitigation, thereby a reading that has little to do with Spinoza. If we imagine *modes*, whether of thought or extension, as isolated billiard balls bumping into each other, thus being the causes of one another's movements, we shall get nowhere with our understanding. An *image*, as such, cannot exhaust the cognizance of a *thing* or of its *essence*, as Deleuze rightly points out: «An image is, in the strictest sense, an imprint, a trace or physical impression, an affection of the body itself, the effect of some body on the soft and fluid parts of our own body; in the figurative idea, an image is the idea of an affection which makes an object

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

known to us only by its effect. But such knowledge is not knowledge at all, it is at best recognition. And from this there follow the characteristics of indication in general: the primary “thing indicated” is never our essence, but always a momentary state of our changing constitution; the secondary (or indirect) thing indicated is never the nature or essence of some external thing, but is rather an appearance that only allows us to recognize a thing by its effect, to rightly or wrongly assert its mere presence»²²⁵. Asserting mere presence amounts to reducing *truth* to *correspondence*, as re-cognition “skips over the thing”, to use a Heideggerian expression, for it does not capture the thing but projects an abstraction upon it. We said that a thing is the «tip of an iceberg» and the *image* only depicts the tip. We learned already with Bruno never to lose a perspective of *unity*, which corresponds to *intensity*, and we know that in Spinoza what is affected really is *substance*, not simply my mind or my body, which are affections of *substance* themselves and, thus, they are *in substance*. The *iceberg* corresponding to the tip, at the end of the day, is nothing but *substance* itself, which is *extensively* composed of the concurrence of infinite causal series that determine a particular affection and *intensively* expressing a certain degree of *power* for the emergence of the “tip” over its competing *modes*. Bruno sees the contents of our knowledge as *shadows*: as the ἔν καὶ Πάν needs to cast shadow upon itself in order for particulars to be distinguished. In the same way Heidegger needs *Being* to be concealed in order to reveal itself in the *open region* [*Lichtung*], which is the theatre and the stage of such concealment and, therefore, unconcealment.

We said, in many different instances, that *gnosiology* wants to address *knowledge* through an act of distinction or discrimination within something that is undifferentiated. That is what we made of Heraclitus’ saying that «if all things were smoke we would discriminate them with our nose»; but all things *are* smoke, in the sense that they are *all substance*, including our nose. We could say that, somehow, Malevitch’s painting representing a white square on another white square, exposed in a white room, under a white light, symbolically describes our condition.

²²⁵ G. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, p. 146.

Nevertheless, this seems rather counterintuitive as all things generally appear to us already distinguished. That is a mere illusion, though, as recognizing *objects* as tables, carrots, cats and men and conferring on them a downright *reality* means severing them from each other, thus losing the perspective of *unity*, which causes the absurdity of generating many different *substances* as *objects*. Furthermore, we would have to imagine tables and cats existing without the context of a world of people who sit and dine or tenderly stroke them. In the first Scholium of Pr. 40, part II of the *Ethics*, Spinoza does have an answer for our behaviour and proposes a different approach that somehow accounts for our tendency to treat “things” as we have just described. He starts precisely from the situation of *inadequacy* that was earlier set out, attributing it to the limits a human body and a human mind have in their ability to represent many images at once, thus resulting in a situation of confusion and fragmentation:

This conclusion can also be reached from the fact that images are not always equally vivid, and also from other causes analogous to these, which I need not here explicate. For it all comes down to this, that these terms signify ideas confused in the highest degree. Again, from similar causes have arisen those notions called “universal”, such as “man”, “horse”, “dog”, etc.; that is to say, so many images are formed in the human body simultaneously (e.g. of man) that our capacity to imagine them is surpassed, not indeed completely, but to the extent that the mind is unable to imagine the unimportant differences of individuals (such as the complexion or stature of each, and their exact number) and imagines distinctly only their common characteristics insofar as the body is affected by them. For it was by this that the body was affected most repeatedly, by each single individual. The mind expresses by the word “man” and predicates this word of an infinite number of individuals. For, as we said, it is unable to imagine the determinate number of individuals.²²⁶

Spinoza is not particularly keen on “universals”, traditionally understood, for they are determined by those features that appeal more frequently to one’s senses and those are not necessarily the same in all individuals. Our inability to deal with the infinite variety of the world causes *inadequate ideas*; it is obvious that, although Spinoza does think that knowing causal relations amongst things does provide us with a

²²⁶ B. Spinoza, “Ethics”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, pp. 266-67.

knowledge that is less confused and thus makes us less vulnerable to external affections, he surely does not expect us to account individually for infinite causal chains to explain the world around us. Nevertheless, in *Ethics* II, Spinoza introduces the concept of *common notions*, which allow us to put some order in the confusion of our ideas, derived from the overwhelming sense experience:

Lemma 2 All bodies agree in certain respects.

Proof All bodies agree in this, that they involve the conception of one and the same attribute (Def. 1, II), and also in that they may move at varying speeds, and may be absolutely in motion or absolutely at rest.²²⁷

He subsequently affirms in prop. 38:

Those things that are common to all things and are equally in the part as in the whole can be conceived only adequately.

[...]

Corollary Hence it follows that there are certain ideas or notions common to all men. For (by Lemma 2) all bodies agree in certain respects, which must be (preceding Pr.) conceived by all adequately, or clearly and distinctly.²²⁸

The proof, which we have omitted, is based on the fact that what is common to all bodies, in the part as in the whole, is necessarily perceived adequately by the mind, insofar as God constitutes the human mind, *i.e.* he has the ideas that are in the human mind. Spinoza is here talking of *agreements* between bodies, which make the bodies themselves conceivable, such as being understood under the same *attribute*, for instance. As Deleuze points out: «Spinoza carefully distinguishes common notions, on the one hand, and transcendental terms (being, thing, something) or universal notions (genera and species, man, horse, dog) on the other. And yet common notions are themselves universal, “more or less” universal according to their degree of generality; one must then suppose that Spinoza is not attacking what is universal, but only a certain conception of abstract universality»²²⁹. The problems with abstract

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

²²⁹ G. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, p. 277.

ideas are, in Deleuze's interpretation, essentially two: the fact that the quality that is universalized is subject to chance, as in the case of a dog, that for some is identified with barking, for others with being a faithful pet; the fact that our incapacity to think adequately the immense variety of ideas makes us project upon all of them those features that we think to be universal, even if they do not possess them. This situation produces a confused understanding. For Deleuze, what Spinoza really refers to with *common notions* is the community of "structures", *i.e.* the system of relations. «By inquiring how these relations», says Deleuze «vary from one body to another, we have a way of directly determining the resemblances between two bodies, however disparate they may be. The form and function of an organ in a given animal depend solely on the relations between its organic parts, that is, between fixed anatomical components. In the limit Nature as a whole is a single Animal in which only the relations between the parts vary»²³⁰. Deleuze here hits a very important point, which is the fact that an adequate intelligibility of particular things can only occur through an *omni-relational* understanding of them, which is knowledge of the relations of living parts within a *unity*. Also the notion of being in motion or at rest is to be understood within an *omni-relational unity*²³¹. A universal feature becomes *abstract* once it is taken out of the system of *relations*, thus having little to do with the reality of things, as was explored in Chapter III by recurring to the metaphor "tip of the iceberg". This capacity that *common notions* provide us with is what Spinoza calls *knowledge of the second kind*:

From the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things (see Cor. Pr. 38 and 39 with its Cor. and Pr. 40, II). I shall refer to this as "reason" and "knowledge of the second kind".²³²

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

²³¹ The relational structure of reality will be an important feature of Bruno's art of memory in Chapter VIII.

²³² G. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, p. 267.

The ideas are *adequate* because they allow us to handle the things and the world around us. They empower us to an extent: although we are not yet able to understand and capture *substance* as such, we are given the chance to manage the overwhelming burden of sense experience. Spinoza grants common notions *adequacy* because they are *clear and distinct* to the extent that we do not suffer the affections of things around us but somehow master them through their *agreement* with us. Such knowledge is sufficient to develop a sound scientific understanding and an advanced technological level. Nevertheless, Spinoza could not possibly stop here, as *common notions* are, indeed, in God in virtue of their adequacy but they can only account for an *extensive* understanding of the world. What makes this kind of knowledge only the second out of three is that it does not *know particular things* which, as we said in the previous section, is the only way to get to an understanding of God.

So far we have discovered that neither our being at the mercy of affections, thus of *inadequate ideas*, nor our taking rational control through their generality by deriving *common notions* actually gives us a proper understanding of particular things. If we are to achieve knowledge as *distinguishing within unity*, approaching the matter on a merely *extensive* level will not lead us much farther. As a matter of fact, we saw that *extension* only allows for numerical distinctions, such as duration or length, which are not real distinctions. Lloyd is puzzled by a similar problem: «But what are we to make of Spinoza's claim that singular bodies cannot be adequately perceived? And, more importantly, what are we to make of the claim that the human mind cannot even know itself adequately? It may seem obvious that Spinoza is urging us to transcend the illusions of the imagination in order to see the world adequately through reason. But we need to remember here the implications of Spinoza's treatment of the individual mind as idea of a body inserted in the totality of determinate modes of extension. If duration and singularity are illusions, the illusion extends to the existence of the finite singular minds which we ourselves are. If it is all illusion, that applies to us, whose defective knowledge supposedly produces the illusions. Not only is this high-minded goal of adequate knowledge inevitably too

difficult for us to attain. Reaching it would, it seems, have to be at the cost of forfeiting our own existence»²³³. Through this last hypothesis Lloyd immediately takes us to the point where we left Bruno, the myth of Actaeon and the achievement of unity with Nature – the *Naked Diana* – through the loss of individuality, devoured by our own insane lust for knowing – Actaeon’s dogs. Bruno definitely excluded that this could be achieved through a mere exercise of reason. Unlike Lloyd, I believe Spinoza does not urge us to achieve a unity with the world through *mere reason*. As far as we have seen, Spinoza identifies reason exactly with *knowledge of the second kind*, which does not give us access to the essence of particular things, therefore to God. The *Ethics* as a philosophical and literary work can definitely be seen as a rather complex application of the *knowledge of the second kind*, as it applies reason by formulating a sophisticated system that is supposed to give us a better understanding of the world but also, being an *ethics*, a more adequate way of inhabiting it. What we have observed about the different kinds of knowledge is valid just as much for Spinoza’s *Ethics* itself. If we consider it as an important book written by some famous modern philosopher and present in most bookstores and libraries, the *Ethics* is understood through *knowledge of the first kind*. On the other hand, as a philosophical work, academically studied and analyzed by students and scholars who put to the test the validity of its propositions, the *Ethics* is understood rationally through *knowledge of the second kind*; through its study we come to have *adequate* ideas about its arguments. We could also say that it is also written according to *knowledge of the second kind*. In neither of these two cases is the *Ethics* captured in its *essence*, though; in the first case its *power* is limited and reduced by the fragmentary and stereotypical knowledge of the general public, in the second case by the criteria and the methods of academia. If Bruno was an academic of no academy, Spinoza was no academic at all. The *Ethics* is a work that, as long as it is understood as an academic text – and thus through a common notion that classifies it as such – is not understood as a *particular thing*, a work that nevertheless is meant to make us

²³³ G. Lloyd, *Spinoza and the Ethics*, p. 60.

understand how to understand *particular things*. As a matter of fact, in virtue of this peculiarity, it is no exception. Nonetheless its study is not unfruitful, as it provides us with those adequate ideas that make us realize the need for a *knowledge of the third kind* or understanding of *particular essences*:

Apart from these two kinds of knowledge there is, as I shall later show, a third kind of knowledge, which I shall refer to as “intuition”. This kind of knowledge proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things. I shall illustrate all these kinds of knowledge by one single example. Three numbers are given; it is required to find a fourth which is related to the third as the second to the first. Tradesmen have no hesitation in multiplying the second by the third and dividing the product by the first, either because they have not yet forgotten the rule they learned without proof from their teachers, or because they have in fact found this correct in the case of very simple numbers, or else from the force of the proof of Proposition 19 of the Seventh Book of Euclid, to wit, the common property of proportionals. But in the case of very simple numbers, none of this is necessary. For example, in the case of the given numbers 1,2,3, everybody can see the fourth proportional is 6, and all the more clearly because we infer in one single intuition the fourth number from the ratio we see the first number bears to the second.²³⁴

If *knowledge of the third kind* is referred to as “intuition”, then we have the confirmation that a faculty of that kind needs to be acquired through a certain kind of practice and cannot be found in a text. If *essences* are to be understood *sub specie aeternitatis*, thereby not extensively, we shall find a description of a *particular essence* neither in the *Ethics* nor in any other text. Even in the numerical example provided by Spinoza, the intuition of the number 6 is not achieved numerically, *i.e.* extensively, and thus it cannot be described. So we find ourselves in a situation where the text that would like us to reach an understanding of a certain kind of knowledge is unable to make it explicit, not out of incapacity but out of the very constitution of what is to be known. What we have achieved is an understanding of the ontological and gnosiological conditions we rest on and which, on their own, cannot take us any farther. The *Ethics* is concealing the access to such knowledge *because* it is the only way of revealing it; it is inviting us to practise this truth, although it does not just *say* or *utter* the truth, it is steering our *desire* towards it (Pr. 28, *Ethics*, Part V):

²³⁴ B. Spinoza, “Ethics”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, pp. 267-68.

The conatus, or desire, to know things by the third kind of knowledge cannot arise from the first kind of knowledge, but from the second.²³⁵

In other words, the *Ethics* is itself the *open region* where ἀλήθεια can happen but only if we stand in it. In order to do this we need to step into the actual field of *ethics* and start considering our position.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

Part III

Ethics

Chapter VII - Thinking

Section 1 - The practice of thinking and the political

Gnosiology took us to a point where understanding *particular things*, thus distinguishing τὰ πάντα from the perspective of *unity*, left *man* in a position of being himself part of the game of truth as *unconcealment*. *Man* has to place himself within the *open region*, in a position that leaves him exposed and questions his role as master of nature. Spinoza's *Ethics* was seen as the book that reveals the truth by concealing it behind the practice of reason. *Essences* are not knowable because they are *undistinguished*. Nevertheless, we would like to show that the *Ethics* is the place of intensity where the *third kind of knowledge* occurs, where *essences of particular things* are intuited and where *essences*, which are not determined, are seen as expressing determination. This is nothing but the game of truth, where *unconcealment* reveals through *concealing*. In Bruno we saw how *shadows* are recognized as the *latency of truth*. Yet Bruno also provides us with the myth of Actaeon, which sees the philosopher as the seeker of a truth – precisely the one we outlined – that he cannot reach without annihilation. Nevertheless, it is this very tension that brings the philosopher to understand the game of truth in the course of his seeking: it takes *madness*, mindless and passionate *love* to pursue knowledge and truth. *Gnosiology* described what happens in the *open region* where the truth of Being comes to the fore. We are yet to understand, though, what this participation in the game of truth amounts to *ethically*, in *man's* active inhabiting of the world, a relation of *dwelling*. Etymologically, *ethics* derives from ἦθος, which indicates custom, habit or practice and from which stems the adjective ἠθικός, which indicates what is related to custom and habit. Now, if custom, habit and practice were to be anthropologically understood, they would be limited to a description of a particular culture or civilization but, on the *philosophical* level, we are dealing with an

inhabiting that is a «being-in» within a pre-given horizon of understanding. In the early Heidegger this notion starts coming to the fore through *Sein und Zeit*: «[...] and so *ich bin* means in its turn “I reside” or “dwell alongside” the world as that which is familiar to me in such and such a way»²³⁶. Our dwelling does not, then, correspond to inhabiting a house or a city, it is the way in which Being delivers itself historically through us and what we recognize as familiar. Furthermore, we should by no means consider the *ich* as a return to *subjectivity*, which in the previous chapters has lost its ontological role as constitutive of the world and has been assimilated to the Brunian and Spinozist perspectives. It has thereby been suggested that such knowledge can only happen in the absence of the Cartesian separation between *subject* and *object*. In order to explore the possibility of replacing a technological mastery of nature with a proper relation of *dwelling*, we would like to devote this section to Heidegger’s political experiment and its theoretical setting. We wish to account for Heidegger’s own stepping onto the public arena, which is a quest for knowledge, for it is concerned with reforming the university, the house of knowledge. It is a preliminary sketch that will provide us with an understanding of the urge that drives Heidegger towards the necessity of *dwelling*. It will be Heidegger’s political failure which makes him realize that no real transformation can arise from a politically driven change, which ends up being, once more, a technocratic and technological form of dominion. This is even truer in the case of Nazi politics. We shall see that the *essence of politics* is something quite different.

«*Most thought-provoking is that we are still not thinking – not even yet, although the state of the world is becoming constantly more thought-provoking*»²³⁷. In Chapter I we have encountered a similar statement in relation to *memory*, then to technology which, analogously to this one, was pronounced during the last lectures at the University of Freiburg between 1951 and 1952. We are going to explore this

²³⁶ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Blackwell, Oxford 2004, p. 80.

²³⁷ M. Heidegger, *What is called thinking?*, translated by J. Glenn Gray, Harper Perennial, New York 2004, p. 4.

affirmation under a different perspective. If «the state of the *world* is becoming increasingly *thought-provoking*», then we should inquire into the world of the philosopher in its *political* dimension, that is not simply understood in relation to nature but is revealed as *being-with-others*. This may seem counter-intuitive, at least from a historical point of view: in 1951 Heidegger had given up any sort of participation in the political life. We do not wish to provide a critical account of Heidegger's political opinions, even less of his involvement with Nazism; we wish to reflect upon the way Heidegger thought whether and how *politics* could contribute to defining the task of thinking, at least at some point in his life. By addressing the issue of the *political* within this discourse we intend to account for the active role of *thinking* while *man* interacts with his *world*. Heidegger says: «ontologically, 'world' is not a way of characterizing those entities which Dasein essentially is *not*; it is rather a characteristic of Dasein itself»²³⁸. Similarly, in relation to others he claims: «by Others we do not mean everyone else but me – those over against whom the 'I' stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself – those among whom one is too»²³⁹. Also in the case of collective experience, the point of departure is an undistinguished unity. Such a unity is expressed in our experience of the world as the *political*.

If the *political* has to be brought into the discourse on *ethics*, it cannot be considered as the attempt to define a certain kind of government or institution to be forced on a number of *subjects* with similar intentions or objectives, with certain rights and duties, in the manner of traditional political philosophy. The *political* problem in its *essence* needs to capture the necessity of belonging to a pre-given horizon of co-determination between us, the world and others and, at the same time, evaluate our margin of action within that horizon. Heidegger does not produce an «Ethics» in its own right, for the whole of Heidegger's philosophical production is inherently *ethical*, *i.e.* inseparable from habit, custom and practice. As David Webb

²³⁸ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 80.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

puts it: «For Heidegger, there is an unbreakable link between philosophy and the existence of Dasein, insofar as the temporal horizon for the disclosure of Being is to be elicited from the existence of Dasein itself, in and through which the ontological difference occurs. Fundamental ontology rests on an ‘ontic foundation’»²⁴⁰. What is not viable is the extraction of a deontological or moral type of ethics from any of Heidegger’s texts, for his philosophy does not contemplate a substantial *subject*, able to catalyze moral praise or blame. Miguel de Beistegui confirms the claim that Heidegger does not take further steps in the direction of a “proper ethics”: «So, once again, Heidegger maintains his analysis at the fundamental ontological level, without introducing anthropological considerations that would illustrate the basic structure laid out. If an ethics or a politics could indeed unfold from this fundamental existential constitution, Heidegger refuses to consider it»²⁴¹. Heidegger’s reticence is, nevertheless, understandable if the level of fundamental *ontology* is to be maintained. Heidegger is not after a mere cultural operation, not after a re-organization of morals or political institutions. The activity of organizing *beings*, including *humans beings*, according to moral and political structures reproduces the technological scheme of attempting to rearrange a world conceived as an object of consumption: «[...] since the emptiness of Being can never be filled up by the fullness of beings, especially when this emptiness can never be experienced as such, the only way to escape it is incessantly to arrange beings in the constant possibility of being ordered as the form of guaranteeing aimless activity. Viewed in this way, technology is the organization of a lack, since it is related to the emptiness of Being contrary to its knowledge»²⁴². As the understanding of the world is reduced to «standing reserve», so would human beings. Heidegger’s criticism of the current state of affairs could be assimilated to many environmentalist or no-global stances of our time but such stances are not equipped to intervene politically because they only advocate a

²⁴⁰ D. Webb, *Heidegger, Ethics and the Practice of Ontology*, Continuum, London 2009, p. 29.

²⁴¹ M. de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*, Routledge, Oxon 1998, p. 15.

²⁴² M. Heidegger, “Overcoming Metaphysics”, in M. Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, translated by J. Stambaugh, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2003, p. 107.

different use of resources and technology, thereby questioning neither the essence of technology nor the essence of *politics*. If *politics* has to be understood *essentially*, it has to be understood in the *ethical* terms of *dwelling*. Again, this means walking on the thin line between what is retained and what is revealed, between the *ontological* and the *ontic*, the *intensive* and the *extensive*. Heidegger defines the domain within which *thinking* should operate as «a domain of metontological-*existentiell* questioning»²⁴³, meaning that it should move across the ontological difference without covering it up. As Webb puts it: «[...] thinking has to follow or repeat the movement essential to the existence of Dasein itself. This is what Heidegger means when he says that thinking must return into the originary dimension in which world-formation occurs»²⁴⁴.

Heidegger claims that when Aristotle defines man as a ζῷον πολιτικόν in his *Politics*, he does not mean that man is a *political animal*, which may make sense to a modern ear but does not capture what is being said. The art of *politics* in Ancient Greece and particularly in Athens refers to a proper place, which is the πόλις, at once a city and a system of relations amongst men. As Heidegger says: «*In the being of human beings themselves, lies the basic possibility of being-in-the-πόλις*. In being-in-the-πόλις, Aristotle sees the genuine life of human beings. To show this he refers to the fact that the being of human beings is λόγον ἔχειν. Implicit in this determination is an entirely peculiar, fundamental mode of the being of human beings characterized as “being-with-one-another”, κοινωνία. These beings who speak with the world are, as such, *being-with-others*»²⁴⁵. The *political* sphere, then, is not only depicted as essential for *man* but it makes explicit his co-determination with the *world* and *others* that was mentioned earlier in this chapter. Even more crucial is the description of the

²⁴³ M. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, translated by W. McNeill and N. Walker, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1995, p. 359.

²⁴⁴ D. Webb, *Heidegger, Ethics and the Practice of Ontology*, p. 77.

²⁴⁵ M. Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, translated by R.D. Metcalf and M. B. Tanzer, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2009, p. 33.

relation between *man* and the world as a *speaking*²⁴⁶ one that is a consequence of having λόγος and which does not amount to defining *man* as an *animal rationale*. Here λόγος is conceived only as the *potentiality* for being rational, the capacity of speaking which gives birth to *politics*, *i.e.* the constitution and life of a πόλις as a network of relations amongst citizens. Thus, if the possibility of constituting a πόλις amounts to *being-with-others*, then speaking with the world, being *familiar* with it, *i.e.* relating to it in a co-determining manner, is also included in the *political* sphere. The act of *speaking* through λόγος takes place with the medium of voice – φωνή – thus providing an immediate encounter with the world, for it allows *man* to grasp the world as a «general topic of investigation»²⁴⁷, whereas for animals such encounter happens from a different perspective, the one of a voice which is a mere φωνή. We do not have the space to address the theme of φωνή, but what is interesting is its original bond with λόγος. In Heraclitus we saw that λόγος was the force that steered *beings*, the outbreak of τὰ πάντα that is *intensively* expressed in the distinction of *beings*. In the essential realm of the *political*, the φωνή is the instrument of λόγος, the power that keeps a *multiplicity* of “others” together as a *unity* in a co-determination that is analogous to that of *man* and *world*.

The *essences* of *being-in-the-πόλις* and *being-in-the-world* necessarily overlap: distinction only occurs on the determinate level of human relations. The relation of *man* and the *world* discloses itself as a relation of *dwelling*. Young puts it as follows «‘essential dwelling’, is the human ‘essence’. Even if we are oblivious to the fact, we all live in a holy world, a world, that is to say, which is to be cared-for. Whether we know it or not, this is the *truth* of the matter. It follows that we *are* the guardians of B/being – in fact its sole guardians – whether we practise this or not so our guardianship is our proper, our ‘fitting’ way of being-in-the-world, whether or not we

²⁴⁶ I do not wish to use the term “verbal” to denote such a relationship, as that may limit the reference to language conceived as a grammatical system of words, which is definitely not the meaning that is being suggested here.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

are conscious of that task and whether or not we live up to it»²⁴⁸. In the instance of the *political* such *guardianship* of *Being* is expressed by letting the *being-with-others* come forth, which can happen through the use of voice but also through the encounter with space. In *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, Heidegger affirms that *building* is our way of attaining *dwelling*, for *building* allows spaces to come forward through *letting-dwell*, by letting what he calls the «fourfold» – sky, earth, mortals and divinities, *i.e.* the *world* – come together thanks to the creation of space, which is not a metaphysical space, *i.e.* calculated and measured. Building a Royal Palace or a Parliament, depending on what ideas I have of politics, is not necessarily going to finally realize *κοινωνία*; indeed, they are most likely to cover up what they are suppose to *let dwell*. *Being-with-one-another* is the understanding of my co-essentiality with others, in virtue of the fact that we are co-essential with the world: whatever is built should not be rhetorically constructed on the model of an idea, it should spring from this coming-together of *man* and *nature* and therefore of *man* with *others*. That is why Heidegger admired Ancient Greek religious and civic buildings, which followed the lines and the shapes of the hills they were built on, as an encounter, a continuation of *nature*, for they were expression of the *political* essence of *man*. That is also what Heidegger means by *dwelling* and this is how he relates it to *thinking*:

Building and thinking are, each in its own way, inescapable for dwelling. The two, however, are also insufficient for dwelling so long as each busies itself with its own affairs in separation instead of listening to one another. They are able to listen if both – building and thinking – belong to dwelling, if they remain within their limits and realize that the one as much as the other comes from the workshop of long experience and incessant practice.²⁴⁹

Separation amounts to an inability to listen to the *φωνή*, which is the instrument of the *λόγος*, which keeps the *multiplicity* as *unity*, thus failing to achieve the *being-*

²⁴⁸ J. Young, *Heidegger's Later Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, pp. 91, 92.

²⁴⁹ M. Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking”, in M. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language and Thought*, translated by A. Hofstadter, Perennial Classics, New York 2001, pp. 158, 159.

with-one-another, which is the expression of politics in its essence. More generally, fragmentation and specialization demolish any possibility for *dwelling* because they are unable to capture *man*'s belonging and unity with *nature*.

In the sense we have explored, then, *politics* and *knowledge* conflate in their *essence* and thus it should not surprise us that Heidegger's stepping into *politics* happened through the university, which is the house of knowledge. Very late in his career, in 1969, long after his political adventure and defeat, Heidegger still affirms: «We all still need an education in thinking, and first of all, before that, knowledge of what being educated and uneducated in thinking means»²⁵⁰. Heidegger is still lecturing, he is still somehow within the educational institution that is known as the “university” and still convinced that *thinking* has been covered up by the very practice of *science* and its technological turn. What is urgent, for Heidegger, has not changed if compared to the time when he tried to enact his reform of the German university through the means of politics. The *Rector's Address*, partially explored in Part II of the present work, introduced us to the notion of *clearing*. I wish, now, to look at the text from a different angle, as it constitutes a *unicum* within Heidegger's production and it can be read at different levels. We are walking on a «domain of metontological-*existentiell* questioning»²⁵¹ a thin line between Heidegger's actual political enterprise and thinking on the *essential level*. The political context of the *Rector's Address* shows Heidegger's skill in condensing different layers of significance in such a brief exposition: here philosophy is heavily interpolated with Heidegger's wish to reform the German university in a determinate political moment, *i.e.* his appointment as Rector of the University of Freiburg by the newly formed National Socialist government. This element is rather functional to the present treatment of *ethics* as it lends us the opportunity to observe what happens when a radical philosophy based on fundamental *ontology* crosses over the line to the *ontic* political level. I am by no means trying to assess Heidegger's degree of involvement

²⁵⁰ M. Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”, in M Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, edited by D. F. Krell, Routledge, Oxon 2007, p. 449.

²⁵¹ See n. 243.

with Nazism or trying to provide a moral evaluation of Heidegger as a person. This is an interesting and yet unresolved matter and it has been carried out, with different outcomes, by a substantial number of authors; nonetheless, it does not have any direct implications for what I am trying to study, which is the role of *ethics* at the level of fundamentally *ontological* philosophical practice. What will be observed regarding the context of the *Rektoratsrede*, then, has only the scope of shedding light on the text and evaluating its relevance to the *ethical* discourse outlined so far. One should be aware, nevertheless, that at the time of the *Rektoratsrede* Heidegger had not yet developed a critique of modern technology or articulated the theme regarding the *task of thinking*; but the failure of his project of reform will have a strong impact on the philosophy of the so-called *later Heidegger*.

The *Rector's Address* appears as encoded into a very precise political framework that is not immediately related to philosophy. Victor Fariás, in his thoroughly documented book, *Heidegger and Nazism*, portrays effectively how Heidegger, in 1933, ideally fit into Hitler's radical reform of German society in a National Socialist direction: «This extreme reform model advocated a complete renewal of the conception of the sciences (in teaching and research) for the universities and meant a substantial shift in procedures and work at the universities, especially as it affected the relationship between students and professors. The most important leader and spokesman for this kind of university reform was Martin Heidegger»²⁵². Fariás' disputed account sketches, drawing on witnesses of the time, an image of Martin Heidegger as a strong supporter of the new regime, an account that does to some extent seem likely, considering that the regime itself chose him as the first Nazi rector of the University of Freiburg. Nonetheless, Fariás, though well informed, tends to forget that Heidegger is a philosopher and not a politician; as a matter of fact the Chilean author rarely considers the implications of this aspect. As Beistegui clearly outlines in *Heidegger and the Political*, Heidegger's wish to reform

²⁵² V. Fariás, *Heidegger and Nazism*, translated by P. Burrell, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1989, p. 98.

the German university is nothing new and is rooted in a tradition of thinkers that span the 19th century, since Napoleon's victory over Prussia in 1812. In that particular instance Prussia lost control of Magdeburg and of the University of Halle, the most prestigious amongst the German universities. This event changed the perspective on the institution of the university as such, which had lost the cosmopolitan traits it used to have in Kant's time, and culminated in the dispute between Fichte and Schleiermacher. Says Beistegui: «Fichte himself actually thinks the university in the context of its inscription in a larger totality, that of the nation and of the State. Schleiermacher's conception is quite different: he insists on the limited role of the State – limited to financial support – in order to guarantee the independence of the institution [...] Whereas Schleiermacher and Humboldt's system insists on the autonomy of the various sciences, Fichte wishes to see those sciences unified under a common, *philosophical* concept of science»²⁵³. Heidegger is indeed determined to change a university that is still modelled on Schleiermacher's ideas and he does pursue a unifying project of Fichtean flavour but he does not share Fichte's nationalistic urges (at least not at the philosophical level) or his rational and systematic conception. Heidegger is concerned about the fact that the university has become an institution of highly specialized and fragmented disciplines, where philosophy itself has been reduced to a discipline amongst the others and has lost its role as mother of all sciences; the *essence of Science*, the very unifying principle of all sciences, has itself been forgotten²⁵⁴, turning the sciences into a number of highly technical forms of knowing. Again, fragmentation is the centre of a situation of loss of *memory* because it *forgets* the *essence of science*, «the power that hones and embraces *Dasein* in its entirety»²⁵⁵. It is most likely true that Heidegger saw the rise to power of the National Socialist Party as an opportunity to reform the university but that does not imply that he and the Nazis shared common objectives, also because it is hard to see how the party officers and bureaucrats could grasp the profundity of

²⁵³ M. de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*, p. 38.

²⁵⁴ See Part II, Chapter IV.

²⁵⁵ See n. 138.

Heidegger's thinking. Nevertheless, nationalism is one of the most ambiguous elements in the text:

We understand the German university as the "high" school that, grounded in science, by means of science, educates and disciplines the leaders and the guardians of the fate of the German people. The will to the essence of the German university is the will to science as the will to the historical mission of the German people as a people that knows itself in its state.²⁵⁶

One should not fall into the trap of reading into Heidegger's words any thirst for German domination over the rest of the world or even the Western world. What Heidegger has in mind is something epochal, over which he does not have control or which he does not even hope to fulfil within his lifetime and philosophical work but that, at the same time, he could prepare within the opportunity offered by the new government. Reading Heidegger's proposals for the reform of the German university as politically driven guidelines on which to model university life does not do justice to the profundity of his thought, whilst putting his words into perspective restores the breadth and the splendour his project deserves. In this particular instance the «Letter on Humanism» sheds light on the alleged issue of nationalism:

"German" is not spoken to the world so that the world might be reformed through the German essence; rather, it is spoken to the Germans so that from a destinal belongingness to other peoples they might become world-historical along with them. [...] The homeland to this historical dwelling is nearness to Being.²⁵⁷

In these lines, which are a comment on Hölderlin's poem "Homecoming", it is German culture that needs to rethink itself from the roots in order to capture the essence, not only of Western/European culture but also but also of those long

²⁵⁶ M. Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University", in *Philosophical and Political Writings*, edited by M. Stassen, Continuum, New York 2003, p. 3.

²⁵⁷ M. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", in *Pathmarks*, edited by W. McNeill, Cambridge University Press, New York 2007, pp. 257-258.

neglected cultures coming from the East²⁵⁸ with which a tradition that has claimed universality up to now finally needs come to terms. The German element is not the glorification of a nation, it is the multiplicity distinguished within the unity of *being-with-one-another*. As Beistegui affirms:

The being-with-Others that is destinal is a community, a people. The community or the people is itself defined in terms of its destinality. Yet destiny is not the sum of individual fates. It is itself something that we inherit, something that befalls us. Since Dasein is from the start with other Daseins, its individual fate is given to it as a common fate, which is tantamount to saying that there is no (purely) individual fate. The destiny of a community is freed through communication and struggle, through efforts and decisions, through a common resoluteness.²⁵⁹

Heidegger's failure to reform the German university and his retirement from political life should not suggest that the project of redefining the *task of thinking* is not deeply intertwined with the political sphere, which since the Greeks remains a co-determining factor of our being. The problem of *thinking* should instead be reiterated starting from the track left by Heidegger and those philosophers who expressed this pivotal urge within Philosophy. Although reappropriated and reformulated by Heidegger in terms of a re-capturing of the *essence of Science*, the echo of Husserl's *Crisis* and his project of grounding the European sciences is still current for Heidegger and for us. Husserl, who definitely cannot be suspected of National Socialist sympathies, had grasped what was at stake even though, according to his brightest pupil, he did not go past the metaphysics of the *subject* that, since Descartes, had carried the Western world towards nihilism. Here is what Husserl says in the *Crisis* and it is hard to ignore the parallel with the «Letter on Humanism»:

So the upheaval of a national culture can proliferate, first of all when the advancing universal science becomes the common property of nations that were formerly alien to

²⁵⁸ Just above the last quotation Heidegger had affirmed: "But even the West is not thought regionally as the Occident in contrast to the Orient, not merely as Europe but rather, world-historically out of nearness to the source. We have still scarcely begun to think the mysterious relations to the East that have come to word in Hölderlin's poetry". *Ibid.*, p. 257.

²⁵⁹ M. de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the political*, p. 36.

one another and the unity of a scientific community and the community of the educated spreads throughout the multiplicity of nations.²⁶⁰

Section 2 – Taking care of the Gods

In the previous section of this chapter the *political* was related to *thinking* in what was considered as a metontological-*existentiell* domain by focusing on those co-determining ways of *being* that make political life and engagement possible within a community, such as the πόλις. Heidegger’s active participation in politics was presented as a strong and motivated, yet ultimately failed, attempt to posit the problem of *thinking* through a reform of the German university.

In 1943 and 1944 Heidegger delivers two lecture courses on Heraclitus, which are a meticulous attempt to *think* the origin of Western thought. Rather unusually he starts by telling two anecdotes about Heraclitus which are not intended to transmit any biographical curiosity about the Ephesian thinker. The first anecdote tells of a multitude of foreigners who, looking for the great thinker, find him warming up beside a stove. The crowd, expecting to encounter an extraordinary man and hear words of wisdom, is disappointed at the sight of such a humble and ordinary situation. Nevertheless Heraclitus, noticing their shock, invites them in and says: “Here, too, the gods are present”. The second anecdote offers an analogous situation: here Heraclitus leaves the temple of Artemis in order to play dice with some young boys; to the astonished crowd he exclaims: “Why are you scoundrels surprised? Isn’t it perhaps better to do this, rather than taking care of the πόλις with you?”. What strikes us here is the apparently opposite attitude towards *politics*, if compared to the κοινωνία, the *being-with-one-another*, which was encountered in the previous section. Here the co-determination with the others is broken by an abrupt disinterest

²⁶⁰ E. Husserl, *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology. An introduction to phenomenological philosophy*, translated by D. Carr, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1970, p. 288.

in the public sphere and its implications, such as current affairs, success, career and, most of all, the expectations of the general public as to what a *thinker* should be, which are shown to be as far from reality as possible. What is expected of a *thinker* by the general public is something extraordinary, uncommon, something exciting that would divert the public from ordinary life. Nevertheless, not only does Heraclitus present the foreigners and the Ephesians with something even more ordinary and less interesting than their own everyday life, such as sitting beside a stove and playing children's games, but he relates such activities with the deities and puts them above the citizens' political activity, which is the apex of the Greek man's life. Heidegger argues that Heraclitus does not mean to refute the *political* but to claim that he actually practices it in its most essential, archaic form, which does not correspond to the everyday activities of his fellow citizens:

And what if – thinking in a Greek way – the preoccupation with the gods' presence coincided instead with the highest preoccupation for the πόλις? That is actually the way it is: as a matter of fact the πόλις, always thought in a Greek way, is the centre and the place around which revolves the manifestation of everything that is essentially being and therefore also the non-essence of everything that is. If it is so, then, [...] the thinker who takes care of the essential proximity of the gods is the man who is authentically «political».²⁶¹

Far from advocating a reactionary blend of politics and religion, Heidegger here is looking for an essential way of *being-in-the-world* and *being-with-one-another*, in other words, the *essence of politics*, which cannot be found in the everyday management of the affairs of the πόλις. When Heidegger talks of «thinking in a Greek way», he does not refer to any ordinary Greek person's thoughts but to the Greek *thinker*, incarnated by Heraclitus in this instance, who is not simply different

²⁶¹ M. Heidegger, "Heraklit. Der Anfang des abendländischen Denkens", in M. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. II. Abteilung: Vorlesungen 1923-1944* [1979], V. Klostermann, Frankfurt 1994, pp. 11-12. My translation from the German: «Wie, wenn, griechisch gedacht, die Sorge um die πόλις wäre? So steht es in Wahrheit; denn die πόλις ist, immer griechisch gedacht, der Pol und die Stätte, um die sich alles Erscheinen des wesenhaft Seienden und damit auch das Unwesen alles Seienden dreht. Steht es so, dann ist, [...] der Denker bei seiner Sorge um die Wesensnähe der Götter der eigentlich "politische Mensch"».

from the οἱ πολλοί of his time as he does not engage in the *Gerede* of *Das Man*: he is indeed a *thinker* whose *thinking* is not mediated by 2,400 years of metaphysics, and in whom, nevertheless, metaphysics finds its roots. The great challenge lies in the attempt of experiencing essential *thinking* from our modern and technological perspective. This is exactly why it would be wrong to understand the *gods* as a transcendent correlate of our physical world or, worse, as the ultimate objects of a religion. *Religio*, Heidegger argues, is an essentially Roman word; thus we can talk neither of a Greek religion nor of a Greek theology. In order to see why this is the case, we should explore the nature of the *gods* Heraclitus is referring to and see what significance they have for contemporary *man*.

Heraclitus, as a citizen of Ephesus, lives under the wardship of Artemis, goddess of hunting, represented as carrying torches in both her hands (φωσφόρος). Both the images of hunting and of light indicate that Artemis is related to Φύσις. In its *essence*, we should not see hunting as a mere sport but as that event that brings together humans, animals and nymphs, Artemis' companions representing the game of nature. Light (φῶς), on the other hand, should be interpreted as the manifestation of nature, which, always understood in its essence, is that clearness that allows for the experience of Φύσις. Through the exercise, to which Bruno made a fundamental contribution in Chapter II, we understood that *essential thinking* does not occur through *division* and *fragmentation* but through *bringing together*, composing. From the perspective of the mortal, that means standing within the *clearing* [Lichtung] because that is the place where *beings* are revealed as particulars, yet through the *concealment* of their *unity*. Essential thinking tries to capture this unity that is not determined or measurable. Therefore, Heraclitus is not linked to Artemis according particular determinations, *i.e.* because he is a citizen of Ephesus, but because he is a *thinker* of Φύσις: it is this immediate relation to *nature*, incarnated by the goddess Artemis, that makes of Heraclitus an *essential thinker*, as Φύσις is the *Lichtung* where ἀλήθεια happens. Heraclitus' *being-in-the-world* is thus divine and not religious, as Artemis is the divinity who springs from the bringing forth of the open

region of Φύσις and the subsequent experience of ἀλήθεια, and that bringing forth is identified with *thinking*. The *god* herself has no supernatural power or an all-powerful will; it is simply the ontological intimacy with *nature*. In addition, the *god* is also what is dearest to the πόλις and the *thinker*, who is the one that takes care of the *god* in its essence and is the most essentially *political* citizen.

The presence of the *gods*, therefore, is revealed as a necessity on the way to *thinking* and poses a crucial issue for *thinkers* in the era of *technology*, who live in the *absence* of the *gods*. Heidegger precisely describes what this *absence* amounts to:

The default of God and the divinities is absence. But absence is not nothing. [The non-existent cannot be ‘absent’]. Rather it is precisely the presence, which must first be appropriated, of the hidden fullness and wealth of what has been and what, thus gathered, is presencing, of the divine in the world of the Greeks, in prophetic Judaism, in the preaching of Jesus. This no-longer is in itself a not-yet of the veiled arrival of its inexhaustible nature.²⁶²

Heidegger here traces a significant parallel between the *gods* and the question of Being, which has been concealed together with the *memory* of its concealment: pointing out the *absence* of the *gods* amounts to developing the awareness of the concealment of the *Seinsfrage* and it is exactly for us, men of the *technological* epoch, that this becomes truly relevant. As Young puts it: «The gods, therefore, must be present in modernity even though, as with the bridge, ‘their presence is obstructed...even pushed wholly aside’»²⁶³. Heidegger sees the *poet* as the only one capable not only of pointing out this *absence* but also of being able to experience the lost intimacy with the *gods*, which appears to be of an essentially linguistic nature; «holy names are lacking» says Hölderlin in his poem *Homecoming*, thus revealing exactly the *absence* of the divine and relating it to language at the same time. Heidegger is very explicit in drawing such a connection: «Since we have been a conversation – man has experienced much and named many of the gods. Since language has authentically come to pass as conversation, the gods have come to

²⁶² M. Heidegger, “The Thing”, in M. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language and Thought*, p. 182.

²⁶³ J. Young, *Heidegger’s Later Philosophy*, p. 97.

expression and a world has appeared. But again it is important to see that the presence of the gods and the appearance of the world are not merely a consequence of the occurrence of language; rather, they are simultaneous with it. And this to the extent that it is precisely in the naming of the gods and in the world becoming word that authentic conversation, which we ourselves are, consists»²⁶⁴. This is exactly the reason why *thinkers* like Heraclitus are essential and enjoy intimacy with Φύσις through the *gods*. The gods also pronounce the words that give rise to Western thought but we are deaf to them as our intimacy with Φύσις has been jeopardized by the development of a language that is not coessential with nature – the language of reason and *logic* – which is treated as «as something he [man: *ed.*] has in hand, like a personal belonging, and thus as a handle for his representation and conduct»²⁶⁵, which amounts to saying that language is a mere tool by means of which *nature* is objectified and dominated.

Objectification of *nature* occurs within the *subject/object* dualism, which is at the root of modern science²⁶⁶. We have addressed the shortcomings of the *subject/object* dualism; what is more difficult to grasp is how we could think of a *thing* without representing it as an *object*. Therefore, we should explain what, according to Heidegger, a *thing* is. Shortly after the end of World War II, Heidegger delivered a lecture at the *Bayerische Akademie der Schönen Künste*, entitled *The Thing* [*Das Ding*], which starts off by asking why, in spite of our technological development and the subsequent suppression of distances between places and people, we do not seem to enjoy any *nearness with things*. Heidegger denies the possibility of knowing what a *thing* is only by relying on its outward appearance, *i.e.* all those features that are necessary to the maker in order to make the *thing*. The maker of a jug only needs a few general notions, *i.e.* its being a vessel for liquids, in order to

²⁶⁴ M. Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, translated by K. Hoeller, Humanity Books, New York 2000, pp. 57-58.

²⁶⁵ M. Heidegger, "What are poets for?", in M. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language and Thought*, p. 130.

²⁶⁶ "Science always encounters only what *its* kind of representation has admitted beforehand as an object possible for science", in M. Heidegger, "The Thing", in M. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language and Thought*, p. 168.

produce it but such notions do not say anything of the jug; they only express an *idea* of it, which annihilates the *thing* as something *near* to us and turns it into something that stands opposite us, thus increasing the distance:

That is why Plato, who conceives presence in terms of the outward appearance, had no more understanding of the nature of the thing than did Aristotle and all subsequent thinkers. Rather, Plato experienced (decisively, indeed, for the sequel) everything present as an object of making. Instead of “object” – as that which stands before, over against, opposite us – we use the more precise expression “what stands forth”.²⁶⁷

In Chapter I we saw how Plato incarnates the transition between truth as *unconcealment* and truth as *correctness*. By tracing this situation of distance between man and *things* back to Plato, Heidegger implicitly underlines the radical change that has taken place in *thinking* between Plato and the previous *thinkers* (Heraclitus, Parmenides, Anaximander), who could still enjoy that *nearness* and intimacy with Φύσις, which belonged to *essential thinking*. According to Heidegger, Plato establishes the premises for what will be properly scientific knowledge of nature, which will turn it into something not simply opposite but also measurable and predictable:

It is said that scientific knowledge is compelling. Certainly. But what does its compulsion consist in? In our instance it consists in the compulsion to relinquish the wine-filled jug and to put in its place a hollow within which liquid spreads. Science makes the jug-thing into a nonentity in not permitting things to be the standard for what is real.²⁶⁸

What we consider to be most real, then, which is *science*, that knowledge that we deem to be the standard for reality, truly renders reality empty and abstract and covers up *things* by turning them into meaningless *objects* that count only in virtue of their measures and their general utility; it is a distance that resembles isolation, the isolation of the *subjects* that can relate to Φύσις only in terms of opposition.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

Overcoming this state of opposition and separation is one of the most genuinely phenomenological moments in Heidegger's work, as he provides a content for the much celebrated motto «*back to the things themselves!*» by thinking a *thing* not as an *object* but as a *thing* that “things”. In the case of the jug we should not look for its *essence* – the *jugness* of the jug – in its apparent features of being a vessel for liquids of a certain weight and size but focus on the bringing-forth of the nature of *gift* that characterizes the outpouring of water and wine, a *gift* that remains even when the jug is empty, as it is the trace of that giving where earth and sky are *let-to-dwell*. That is the only way of making sense of Heraclitus' presence in the oven: he is letting earth and sky as warmth (or bread) dwell beside the oven as *a gift*, which amounts to taking care of the *gods*. Why does Heidegger use the word “gift”? When we talked of *thinking as memory*, we understood it as what *gives* through *retention*: recalling the *origin* of such a *gift* means *bringing together*, composing, going back to the original retention that *unconcealed* the *gift*. According to Heidegger, we can only recognize such a *gift* within a *fourfold* of earth, sky, mortals and divinities. The *fourfold* amounts to the cancellation of any opposition or isolation, the ἀρμονία, the *bringing together* that allows Φύσις to appear as a holy activity. *Man*, the mortal, is not a mere maker, Φύσις is not qualified as *standing-resource* and the *gods* are not supernatural powers but that sacred intimacy between *man* and Φύσις, the divine «*destinings*»²⁶⁹, the messengers of such unity, the point of intensity where the *gift* is delivered. This is the most advanced version of *world* Heidegger provides, as opposed to the one encountered in *Sein und Zeit*:

The tolling of the evening bell brings them, as mortals, before the divine. House and table join mortals to the earth. The things that were named, thus called, gather to themselves sky and earth, mortals and divinities. The four are united primally in being toward one another, a fourfold. The things let the fourfold of the fold stay with them. This gathering, assembling, letting-stay is the thinging of things. The unitary fourfold of

²⁶⁹ M. Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology”, in M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by W. Lovitt, Harper Perennial, New York 1977, p. 34.

sky and earth, mortals and divinities, which is stayed in the thinging of things, we call – the world.²⁷⁰

It is now possible to deepen the notion of *ethics* that opened this chapter as a form of «residing» or «dwelling alongside» but which lacked a clear account of the *world*, without which the dwelling would hardly be thinkable. It is the *practice of thinking* that is essentially *ethical*, as it concerns *man* directly not as a Cartesian *res cogitans* but as the coessential side of the *fourfold* – the mortal – that lets beings dwell. Such dwelling amongst beings does happen through a knowing experience, which is not the one proper to modern science but the one that looks back to the *essence of Science*, which was identified as γνῶσις in Part II of this work. What γνῶσις stood for was the distinguishing of τὰ πάντα that happens by standing in the openness of the open region, which «then comes into a connection with what we call world»²⁷¹. In Bruno we saw how this notion amounts to the *composition* of relational *minima* that, from the perspective of the *infinite*, coincide with the One, as *unity* is contained in *particulars*. In Spinoza the knowledge of God, *substance* or *nature*, is achieved through the understanding of *particular essences*. The coincidence of the *whole* with the *particular* is a characteristic of the *infinite* and both Bruno and Spinoza operate through the *infinite* in which, Bruno held, there was no centre and no periphery, which is coherent with the following Heideggerian affirmation: «Man is, he dwells in the midst of the *ens* in its totality, without being its centre in the sense of a foundation that orders and supports the whole *ens*. Man is the centre of the *ens* but, at the same time, he is not himself the centre»²⁷².

Thinking as dwelling is indeed the *essence of man*: only *man* can access *knowledge* but that does not provoke a rift between him and the world or, even worse,

²⁷⁰ M. Heidegger, “What are poets for?”, in M. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language and Thought*, p. 197.

²⁷¹ M. Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, translated by K. Hoeller, Humanity Books, New York 2000, p. 86.

²⁷² M. Heidegger, “Heraklits Lehre vom Logos”, M. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. II. Abteilung: Vorlesungen 1923-1944* [1979], V. Klostermann, Frankfurt 1994, p. 206. My translation from the German: «Der Mensch ist, wohnt inmitten des Seienden im Ganzen, ohne doch dessen Mitte zu sein im Sinne eines Grundes, der alles Seiende vermittelt und trägt. Der Mensch ist in der Mitte des Seienden und ist doch nicht die Mitte selbst».

give him a privileged position within it. As soon as man adopts the Ptolemaic cosmology and assumes such a privileged position, the *world*, the *things* and the *gods* are concealed from him. As long as the encounter between *knowledge* and *dwelling* is preserved, then we can have an *ethics of thinking*, which directly concerns him but only within the fourfold. As Heidegger puts it in his lectures on Heraclitus, *ethics* is a form of knowledge that directly concerns *man*:

[...] ἐπιστήμη ἠθικὴ indicates having a kind of knowing in what belongs to ἦθος. The term ἦθος means originally home, dwelling. Here, in the expression ἐπιστήμη ἠθικὴ we intend τὸ ἦθος *par excellence*. This means the home of man, the sojourn, *i.e.* the «inhabiting» of man in the midst of the *ens* in its totality. The essence in the ἦθος, in the sojourn, is the way in which man is amidst the *ens*, stays by it, maintains himself and lets being. To have a knowing of the ἦθος, that knowing that is relative to it, is «ethics».²⁷³

This *knowing* that concerns man is not at man's disposal; it is not culture or information aiming at increasing the «armoury of useful facts» about the world or himself, as much as the *world* is not something to be objectively captured through *knowing* – as Otto Pöggeler puts it: «The world as the fourfold of earth and sky, gods and mortals is not an in-itself which would stand over against man, but is rather the occurrence of the unconcealment of beings in man»²⁷⁴. *Man* is indeed central in the bringing forth of this *unconcealment* in the form of *dwelling* and *guarding*, which corresponds to his *essence*. *Beings* are *unconcealed* in *man* within the *open region*; they are not divided up into *objects* by a rational *subject*. As Ernesto Grassi puts it: «Being is not knowable through a rational and logical discussion and identification of *beings* – which, as 'participles' of Being, presuppose the knowledge of it – but only

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206. My translation from the German: «Der an dritter Stelle genannte Titel ἐπιστήμη ἠθικὴ bezeichnet das Sichverstehen auf das, was zum ἦθος gehört. ἦθος bedeutet ursprünglich die Wohnung, den Aufenthalt. Hier im Titel ἐπιστήμη ἠθικὴ wird τὸ ἦθος schlechthin gemeint. So bedeutet es den Aufenthalt des Menschen, das Sichaufhalten, nämlich das ‚Wohnen‘ des Menschen inmitten des Seienden im Ganzen. Das Wesentliche im ἦθος, in diesem Sichaufhalten, ist die Art, wie der Mensch sich an das Seiende hält und dabei sich behält und hält und sich halten läßt. Das Sichverstehen auf das ἦθος, das Wissen davon, ist die „Ethik“».

²⁷⁴ O. Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinging*, translated by D. Magurshak and S. Barber, Humanities Press International, Atlantic Highlands 1987, p. 217.

functionally to the lived experience of that urgency of Being which urges and presses in each of our affirmations or negations. Such experience obliges us to posit not only the problem of the function and structure of Being – radically distinct from the one of beings – but also to recognize from the very beginning the originary non-rational character of language»²⁷⁵. Not only is the character of *language* non-rational, it is actually *silent*: if we look at the origin of the word λόγος, which originally appears to be a bringing-together, a gathering not of *objects* but of the distinguished τὰ πάντα into the unity of the ἕν²⁷⁶. In this sense Heraclitus, as reported by Heidegger in his 1944 lectures, invites us not to listen to him speaking but to listen to the λόγος²⁷⁷ in order to understand that «all is one»: this listening is obviously not intended as a form of perceiving an assertion but as that originary listening that allows us to hear and which can only be expressed in terms of belonging:

We do not listen only because we have ears but we have ears and we can be endowed with ears only in virtue of the fact that we listen. But we humans listen, for instance, to the thunder in the sky, the rustling of the wood, the flowing of the water in the fountain, the chords of the harp, the roaring of the engines, the noises of the city; we hear all these things in virtue of the fact that somehow we belong to them and we do not belong to them. [...] The fact of being able to hear the singing of the earth presupposes that our hearing is a sensory hearing that needs an organ of sense, the ear. Being able to hear and hearing are not, then, the same thing.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ E. Grassi, *La preminenza della parola metaforica. Heidegger, Meister Eckhart, Novalis*, Mucchi editore, Modena 1986, p. 16. My translation from Italian: «L'Essere non è conoscibile mediante una discussione e codificazione razionale, logica degli “enti” – che in quanto “participi” dell'Essere ne presuppongono la conoscenza – bensì soloin funzione dell'esperienza vissuta di una impellenza dell'Essere che urge e preme in ogni nostra affermazione o negazione. Tale esperienza ci obbliga a porre non solo il problema della funzione e struttura dell'Essere – radicalmente distinto da quello degli enti – ma fin da principio a riconoscere anche l'originario carattere non razionale del linguaggio».

²⁷⁶ For an in-depth discussion of the gnosiological aspects of the *logos*, please see Part II, chapter IV of this work.

²⁷⁷ See M. Heidegger, “Heraklits Lehre vom Logos”, M. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. II. Abteilung: Vorlesungen 1923-1944* [1979], V. Klostermann, Frankfurt 1994, p. 244. «Have you not just listened to me, ἀλλά, have you, rather, heard the Logos?». My translation from German: «“Habt ihr nicht bloß mich angehört, ἀλλά, sondern habt ihr auf den Logos gehört?».

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 247. My translation from German: «Wir hören nicht, weil wir Ohren haben, sondern wir haben und können haben die Ohren, weil wir hören. Wir Menschen hören aber auch nur z. B. den Donner des Himmels, das Rauschen des Waldes, das Fließen des Brunnens, das Klingen des Saitenspiels, das Rattern der Motoren, das Lärm der Stadt, wir hören das nur insofern wir dem

Our distinguishing and bringing-together into the ἔν, what we have called γνῶσις in our gnosiological account, is nothing but the listening to the singing of the earth – the *gods* letting the *earth* resound by calling the *earth* – that, as mortals, shapes us within the fourfold – in this sense we both belong and do not belong to it. As guardians of the earth, the *essence* of mortals is the very resonance of the divinities' call, that originary λόγος that, by being heard, gives the ability to hear and by being spoken, gives the ability to speak, thus giving access to the openness of the open region where the *unconcealment* takes place, in one word, Φύσις: «But perhaps Φύσις can appear – if the insight into that which is becomes the lightning flash of truth – in the nature of ‘natural language’ and language can enter the discussion as the gathering of the going out, which goes back in itself as λόγος. The most ancient, soon forgotten coining of language – as λόγος – would again be spoken»²⁷⁹.

allein in irgendeiner Weise hören und nicht hören. Wir haben Oren, weil Wir horchsam hören können und bei dieser Horchsamkeit auf das Lied der Erde hören dürfen, auf ihr Erzittern und Beben, das doch unberührbar bleibt von dem riesenhaften Lärm, den der Mensch auf ihrer vernutzten Oberfläche bisweilen veranstaltet. Das Hörendürfen auf das Lied der Erde bedingt es, daß unser Hören ein sinnliches ist, das der Sinneswerkzeuge, der Ohres, bedarf. Hören und Hörenist somit nicht das Selbe».

²⁷⁹ O. Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, p. 226.

Chapter VIII – The Art of Memory

Section 1 – *Ars Combinatoria*

Within the Heideggerian *world* as *fourfold* of sky, earth, gods and mortals, the *thing* loses its objectivity and is received as a *gift*, thus opening up the *ethical* dimension of *dwelling* which, we saw, was *thinking* as letting *things* come forth. It was also seen how such *dwelling* is the essence of *ethics* and how, therefore, *thinking* is an essentially *ethical* matter. In ontological terms, receiving the *gift* is the delivery of Being to beings as the *unconcealment* of its own *concealing* and *unconcealing*. It is not, then, a Christian granting of a grace but an *openness* to the *gift*, a standing in the *Lichtung*, which is the knowing position of the mortal who enjoys intimacy with the gods, the earth and the sky. As such, receiving the *gift* becomes a way of *being-in-the-world* that gives us access to Being through the *distinguishing* of the *things* within the *ἔν* – which, in Part II we have defined as *γνώσις*. We have said in Chapter I that *memory gives by retaining*: the *gift* is what is given by *memory*, and *recollection* is the bringing together of the fourfold in the *gift*. *Thinking*, thus understood, is then ready to be taken to a further stage that will explore its potentialities as a *receiving* and therefore a *being grateful*:

What is it that is named with the words «think», «thinking», «thought»? Toward what sphere of the spoken word do they direct us? A thought – where is it, where does it go? Thought is in need of memory, the gathering of thought. The Old English *thencan*, to think, and *thancian*, to thank, are closely related; the Old English noun for thought is *thanc* or *thonc*. The «thanc», that which is thought, the thought, implies the thanks.²⁸⁰

Naturally Heidegger does not stop at the commonly shared significance of the word «thanks»: gratefulness arises from receiving the *gift* as the *thing*; however we should always bear in mind that the *thing* is not an object but our very nearness to the *world*

²⁸⁰ M. Heidegger, *What is called thinking?*, transl. by J. Glenn Gray, Harper Perennial, New York 2004, pp. 138-139.

which is only possible through *thinking*. Thus receiving the *gift* amounts to receiving exactly what allows us to be what we essentially are, *i.e.* «our essential nature, with which we are gifted in such a way that we are what we are only through it. That is why we owe thanks to this endowment, first and unceasingly»²⁸¹. When Heidegger says «thought is in need of memory», he is making both an etymological and an ontological point: *memory* in its essence is not a mere recollection of things which happened in the past because it belongs to the sphere of piety as *devotion* explicated as contiguity to the *world* within which the *thanc* unfolds. In Heidegger's words: «This thinking that recalls in memory is the original thanks»²⁸². The role of *memory* becomes increasingly crucial if we note that Heidegger claims that Western thinking begins by letting the question of Being remain *forgotten*²⁸³, thus initiating the history of metaphysics, characterized by the transition from the ὑποκείμενον to the modern *subject* which has increasingly impaired us from experiencing *things* as *things* and obliterated our contiguity with the *world*, *i.e.* has prevented us from *thinking*. The recollection of this *forgottenness* demands that we *think* what is most thought provoking and «most thought-provoking is that we are still not thinking»²⁸⁴. The *modern subject* has no *memory* because he does not experience *things* as *gifts* but as *objects*, which are not *given*; they are merely present. As Stephen Mulhall puts it: «according to Heidegger 'memory' initially means a constant concentrated abiding with something (whether past, present or yet to come), a steadfast intimate concentration upon the things that essentially speak to us. And this in turn returns us to the idea of thinking with which the lectures series began, where Heidegger claimed that to think is to be inclined towards that which in turn inclines towards us, and thereby gives us not only particular things to think about but the very capacity for

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²⁸³ As Robert Bernasconi says: «Remembrance takes place only on the basis of the experience of the oblivion of Being». In R. Bernasconi, *The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being*, Humanities Press International, Atlantic Highlands 1985, p. 84.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

thinking that constitutes our essence»²⁸⁵. Once more our understanding of *particular things* affects our very access to Being, as it was in Bruno and in Spinoza. Understanding *things* as *objects*, though, makes them abstract, unreachable, as all we can do, just like in the case of the *jug*, is specify their quantitative determination. *Objects* are not *given* to us; they do not incline towards us, they are not *gifts* because there is nothing that delivers them. Let us recall what Heidegger said in the first Chapter of our work about *memory*: «“Keeping” alone *gives* freely what is to-be-thought, what is most thought-provoking, it frees it *as a gift*. But the keeping is not something that is apart from and outside of what is most thought-provoking»²⁸⁶. *Things* are thought-provoking because they are the *unconcealment* of what is being *kept in safety, retained*. *Memory* recalls their belonging together in a safe place, that is the place of *Being*, the place of *intensity* where determinations disappear.

If we are to encounter Bruno on our Heideggerian path for the third and last time, then, it will be on account of *memory*. Bruno’s *art of memory* is solidly rooted in an old tradition, which dates back to the Greeks, the Romans and even, in the Middle Ages, to Thomas Aquinas and his highly rational and Aristotelian approach. In the Renaissance the interest in the *art of memory* reaches its peak, as we can observe from the sudden abundance of material which, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, invades the intellectual scene in the shape of memory treatises from several European countries. Nevertheless, it is beyond the scope of my research to inquire into the complex Renaissance debate on the *art of memory*²⁸⁷, one that goes back to the Ancient Greeks and to Stoicism in particular. What is crucial here is to understand not only the way Bruno takes the *art of memory* to an extremely advanced and complex technical stage but also, and more importantly, the ontological foundations and consequences of Bruno’s art, which break with any previous tradition, though

²⁸⁵ S. Mulhall, *Inheritance & Originality. Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard*, Oxford University Press, New York 2001, p. 309.

²⁸⁶ See n. 32.

²⁸⁷ To explore the matter in depth, please refer to Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* [1966], Pimlico, London 2008.

eclectically synthesizing and reformulating in an original way what his predecessors had done. What strikes us at first, above all after having explored Heidegger's account, is that for Bruno *memory* is not a mere instrumental recollection of facts through specific techniques but, actually, a *bringing together*. As Yates points out: «The aim of the memory system is to achieve this unifying vision where alone it can be done, for the inner images of things are nearer to reality, less opaque to the light, than are the things themselves in the outer world»²⁸⁸. In Chapter V we saw that Bruno's gnosiology limited human knowledge to *shadows* and could not reach the actual light of truth, which is divine territory, as he confirms in the *De la causa principio et uno*:

Of the divine substance, therefore, because it is both infinite and extremely remote from those effects which constitute the outer limit of the path of our discursive faculty, we can know nothing except by means of vestiges, as the Platonists say, or of remote effects, as the Peripatetics have it, or by means of garments, as the Cabalists say, or of dorsal and back parts, as the Talmudists say, or of a mirror, shadow and enigma, as the Apocalypitics claim.²⁸⁹

Nonetheless, we know from the *Furori* that Bruno is animated by a *loving madness* that pushes him to steer this tension to its limit. The old Neoplatonic structures, which maintain a role only by losing their hierarchical and transcendent nature, are progressively flattened, emptied and re-employed. In order to construct his *art of memory* in perfect harmony with *nature* Bruno takes advantage of the Neoplatonic concept of *universal intellect*, yet getting rid of its original ontological feature, thereby excluding any hierarchical separation between it and the world:

The universal intellect is the innermost, most real and most proper faculty or potential part of the world soul²⁹⁰. It is that one and the same thing that fills everything, illuminates the universe and directs nature to produce her various species suitably. It is

²⁸⁸ F. Yates, *The Art of Memory* [1966], Pimlico, London 2008, p. 225.

²⁸⁹ G. Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity. And Essays on Magic*, transl. and edited by R. de Lucca and R. J. Blackwell, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, p. 35.

²⁹⁰ For a full account of the World Soul, please see Part I, Chapter 2 of this work.

to the production of natural things what our intellect is to the production of the representation of things.²⁹¹

In Chapter II we defined the *Universal Intellect* as the operational point of view of the World Soul: Bruno wishes to replicate the action of the *Universal Intellect* in his own intellect. Rita Sturlese individuates such a connection by tracing a parallel between the *art of memory* and what she calls *art of nature* on the basis of their productive virtue: «In the art of memory free invention of images is not pure fantasy, an incoherent combinatory play of fantasy [...]; it is indeed productive invention, as images are constantly organized and united in a system, in an efficient organism [...]»²⁹². Such inner images, which belong to the realm of imagination, are nothing but the *shadows* we encountered in our *gnosiological* enquiry. If *shadows* are images of the *latency of the truth*, they are what is *given in unconcealment*, then *memory* can *bring them together* to experience what is retained and *kept in safety*.

How is Bruno going to achieve that? Since his early work entitled *De umbris idearum*, Bruno brings forth his original position by introducing the theme of *shadows*, which is man's experience of the latency of truth, the images he has of *nature*. If, on the one hand, Bruno's «Copernican revolution» takes *man* out of the centre of the Universe and throws him into infinity, thus providing him with the same ontological status as all the other beings, on the other hand, *shadows* are his privileged access to *nature*. *Shadows* are *nature* that is *given* through the human imagination. The *knowing* relation to the *shadows of ideas* does not indicate man's position of ignorance but instead underlines his ability to reconcile the gap between unity and multiplicity. Matteo Matteoli, in this respect, affirms: «if, as a matter of fact, the individual resides in the latter [nature: *ed.*], nonetheless he brings within

²⁹¹ G. Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity. And Essays on Magic*, edited and translated by R. J. Blackwell and R. de Lucca, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, p.38.

²⁹² R. Sturlese, «Arte della natura e arte della memoria in Giordano Bruno», in *Rinascimento*, n. 39, year 51, Vol. 40 (2000), p. 130. My translation from Italian: «Nell'arte della memoria la libera invenzione di immagini non è però pura fantasticheria, gioco combinatorio affatto incoerente della fantasia [...]; è invece invenzione produttiva, perché in essa le immagini son sempre organizzate e unite in un sistema, in un organismo efficace [...]».

himself the intellectual potential to mend, starting from the experience of the senses, the fracture of unity with respect to multiplicity»²⁹³. If the bringing together of this fracture does not happen through the means of logic, then, we should remember what he says in the *De la causa*, when he talks of «production» and «representation»: Bruno already explores such potentialities of man in the *De umbris idearum*, where he affirms that «reason, on the other hand, forms new species and in a new fashion»²⁹⁴. Indeed, then, even though *man* is not the ontological centre of the universe, he does retain this *productive* role of closing up the fracture and it will not be his discursive and logical abilities that enable him to do it but the analogical and productive way of *images*, organized in the *art of memory*: «Bruno's interest in the logic of images, as a matter of fact, is associated with a search for instruments that would enable him to guarantee forms of knowledge that could prescind from abstraction. As a knowing tool, the art of memory also has the following value: through the use of images, it allows us to fix the physical reality of single things according to their specific individuality, which in nature are dissolved in the infinite metamorphosis that ensures the life of the universe»²⁹⁵. In the previous chapter we saw that, for Heidegger, what prevented us from actually experiencing a *thing* was the misunderstanding of its *essence*, *i.e.* the *jugness* of the *jug* conceived as the abstraction of its properties and its transformation into something unreal and distant from us. Bruno grants *man* some productive abilities that not even *nature* possesses, as Sturlese notes: «[...] not only does [Bruno] confer full autonomy on the intellect

²⁹³ M. Matteoli, 'L'arte della memoria nei primi scritti mnemotecnici di Giordano Bruno', in *Rinascimento*, n. 39, year 51, Vol. 40 (2000), p. 79. My translation from Italian: «se, infatti, l'individuo risiede in quest'ultima, tuttavia egli porta in sé il potenziale intellettuale per risanare, a partire dall'esperienza sensibile, la frattura dell'unità nel molteplice».

²⁹⁴ G. Bruno, *De umbris idearum*, edited by Rita Sturlese, Firenze 1991, p. 52. My translation from Latin: «Ratio novas atque noviter in infi<ni>tum species format».

²⁹⁵ M. P. Ellero, *Lo Specchio della fantasia. Retorica, magia e scrittura in Giordano Bruno*, Maria Pazzi Facini Editore, Lucca 2005, p. 95. My translation from Italian: «L'interesse di Bruno per la logica delle immagini infatti è associato alla ricerca di strumenti in grado di garantire forme di conoscenza che prescindano dall'astrazione. Come strumento conoscitivo, l'arte della memoria ha anche questo valore: attraverso le immagini essa consente di fissare, nella sua specifica individualità, la realtà fisica dei singoli, che in natura si dissolvono nell'incessante metamorfosi che assicura la vita dell'universo».

with respect to the rules of the physical world but it also provides it with the prerogative of always inventing and finding something new, as opposed to the infinite repetitiveness of nature»²⁹⁶. This does not place *man* outside of *nature*; it makes him the creative and productive centre of *nature*. Again, we should be wary of such Neoplatonic terminology, for the emanation is not to be intended as a hypostasis, as a decay of a superior being endowed with a higher degree of reality, but as an immanent production within *nature*:

But nature produces everything out of its own matter by means of separation, parturition and effluxion, as the Pythagoreans thought, as Anaxagoras and Democritus understood and the sages of Babylon confirmed.²⁹⁷

Within human experience we observe *nature* operating by “separation”, “parturition” and “effluxion”, meaning by determinate physical divisions, giving birth and emanation. What happens through the art of *memory*, on the other hand, is the overcoming of such physical determinations in a creative effort that could provide us with an *intensive* experience of the world, an experience of unity, as Yates agrees: «The aim of the memory system is to establish within, in the psyche, the return of the intellect to unity through the organization of significant images»²⁹⁸. Significant images can only be provided by the *shadows*, which are the “vestiges” of the unity that is being pursued. The *ethical* value of this approach is enormous, as Bruno is not simply interested in providing us with an explanatory model of the universe and with a technical process to be able to know it; he is doing much more. What makes him believe that he is *the* turning point of an epoch is his diagnosis of the *crisis* of politics, religion and, above all, *philosophy*, dominated by pedants and grammarians. Bruno, just like Heidegger, is dissatisfied with the practice of philosophy, which has been

²⁹⁶ R. Sturlese, ‘Arte della natura e arte della memoria in Giordano Bruno’, p. 139. My translation from Italian: «[...] non solo [Bruno: *ed.*] conferisce all’ingegno piena autonomia rispetto alle regole del mondo fisico, ma gli riconosce la prerogativa del sempre inventare e trovare il nuovo, di contro alla ripetitività infinita della natura».

²⁹⁷ G. Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity. And Essays on Magic*, p. 83.

²⁹⁸ F. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p. 224.

reduced to a linguistic exercise. He therefore sees no alternative but putting forward an extreme challenge, which is the very reform of the self in order to start doing philosophy again. As Matteoli observes, «the double value of the theory of shadows, personal and universal, makes then this theme the most suitable mediation between philosophical knowing and the reform of the self; in this sense the art of memory is a coherent part of the process of construction of a new identity»²⁹⁹. The *ethical* aspect of Bruno's *art of memory* is further highlighted by the way he transforms a traditionally technical and methodological art into an emendation of man's intellect, which amounts to another way of inhabiting the world.

As far as the technical aspects of his *art of memory* are concerned, Bruno owes a great deal to the medieval figure of Raymond Lull, who had developed a logico-rational system called the *ars combinatoria*. Such a system is composed of terms connected by syllogistic chains that are inductively demonstrated according to the truth value of those very terms, which are dependent on the terms that immediately precede them. Lull's aim is to build a perfectly matching logical system that would exactly match the metaphysical structure of the world, thus enabling us to elaborate any sort of predicate about the world, a sort of *ante litteram* logical positivist. Bruno assimilates Lull's methodology but radically changes both the premises and the objectives of the *ars combinatoria*. Bruno's main interest is not maintaining logical coherence but navigating within *beings* in terms of their relationship with the One, what we called τὰ πάντα while discussing Heraclitus:

You will undoubtedly discover that you are really progressing, and you will be able to experience it, when you are allowed access from a confused multiplicity to a distinct unity: that does not mean increasing logical universals out of all proportion, which, moving from the low species, confusedly grasp the intermediate species and, moving from these, grasp even more confusedly the highest species. It means, instead to order,

²⁹⁹ M. Matteoli, 'L'arte della memoria nei primi scritti mnemotecnici di Giordano Bruno', in *Rinascimento*, p. 80. My translation from Italian: «Il duplice valore della teoria dell'ombra, personale e universale, rende dunque questo tema il più adatto a mediare tra il sapere filosofico e la riforma e potenziamento del sé; in questo senso l'arte della memoria è parte coerente e consapevole del processo di costruzione di una nuova identità».

as it were, before oneself a formed and unique whole moving from multiple and amorphous parts.³⁰⁰

Not only does Bruno eliminate any ontological hierarchy but also any logical necessity in nature, as Matteoli confirms: «there is no need for logical rigour in order to guarantee that a thing is: it is, as a matter of fact, being, and the produced being, the truth value that bears the most sense within Bruno's world»³⁰¹. The kind of Lullian *ars combinatoria* that Bruno has employed within his own *art of memory* does not claim to be a faithful and exact reproduction of *nature*; it is not an objective correspondence of predicates to reality. Bruno is not a logical positivist who replaces paradigms with images. This is due to the fact that Bruno does not identify the *number* as a real entity – exactly as in the case of Spinoza – but as something abstract and therefore not suitable to provide any understanding of *unity*, which is not understood through numerical determinations. The mathematical and logical structures of the *art of memory*, then, are mere organizational associations. Bruno's *art of memory* does not aim at remembering as many brute facts as possible; what really characterizes it is the ability to create this productive process of organizing and ordering of significant images sculpted and allocated in our *memory* within a complex combinatorial system that corresponds to the world's vicissitude in our psyche and therefore allows us to follow the dynamics of *nature*. That, however, does not amount to reproducing the world or its functioning structure within one's own mind, but rather the steadfast search for the different combinations in which the

300 G. Bruno, *De umbris idearum*, edited by Rita Sturlese, Firenze 1991, p. 54. My translation from Latin, also based on the facing-page Italian translation:

«Talem quidem progressum tunc te vere facere comperies, et experieris cum a confusa pluralitate, ad distinctam unitatem per te fiat accessio. Id enim non est universalia logica conflare, quae ex distinctis infimis speciebus, confusas medias, exque iis confusiores supraemas captant, sed quasi ex informibus partibus et pluribus, formatum totum et unum aptare sibi».

³⁰¹ M. Matteoli, 'L'arte della memoria nei primi scritti mnemotecnici di Bruno', in *Rinascimento*, p. 85. My translation from Italian: «Non occorre nessun rigore logico per garantire che una cosa ci sia: è infatti l'essere, e l'essere prodotto, il valore di verità che ha maggior senso all'interno del mondo di Bruno».

world manifests itself to us. Bruno does not believe in abstract Aristotelian species or categories. He is anchored in the reality of *things* and in the innumerable ways they manifest themselves to us, not as objects, but as the multiplicity of *nature* that needs to be thought as the *unity* of the *ěv*.

The organization of the images happens within a finite structure of organized spaces called *subiecta*, ready to receive the actual *memory* in the shape of an image, the *adiectum*. The *subiectum* – or substratum – does not act as a mere container where significant images are stored but is instead the place where the *phantasia*, the creative activity, moulds and shapes the significant images, thus producing the actual *memory*. The new *memory* is not a brute fact but something new if compared to the mere sense data: when the *adiectum* «apple» enters the *subiectum*, it is neither the particular perception of the apple (its particular sweetness, its particular colour, etc.) nor the universal concept of an apple. The apple is relationally composed through a potentially infinite number of relations: the action of plucking, the myth of Discord, the bite of the peel, etc. And each of these relations reveals another potentially infinite number of relations. An apple stops behaving as an *object* and starts being inscribed in everything that makes it an apple all the way to infinity. In Spinoza, while talking of *modes*, we said they are “tips of an iceberg”, in the sense that what we call *objects* are nothing but the tip of an infinite series of practices, affections, reciprocal causes and effects. Bruno’s *art of memory* gives a figuration to this “iceberg”, it represents it through the power of *imagination*. Understanding *things* as determined by potentially infinite series of relations *brings together multiplicity* and understands it as a *unity* that keeps and reveals. The apple, through its being defined by the subsequent relations – and the relations of these relations – in its tension towards infinity, comes to coincide with the whole of reality. Bruno literally invents a tool to experience the *intensity* of *Being* in its unity through pushing multiplicity to the compositional limits bearable for the human mind. Whereas Heidegger understands *things* as the gathering up of the *fourfold*, Bruno, driven by his heroic

passion – as well as by his hypermnesia – wants to reproduce this gathering, this *bringing together*, through *images*.

This move, then, demonstrates Bruno's originality if compared to his predecessors but also if compared to his successors. I think that to conclude our understanding of this process and to appreciate its significance it is worth listening to Bruno himself in two passages from two of his mnemotechnic works, the *Cantus Circaeus* and the *De umbris idearum*:

As far as the relationship between substrata and images is concerned, the substrata must be intended as entities that let themselves be shaped, moved and altered by the forthcoming images, so that you can easily represent them. They have to be intended, I mean, as places destined to suffer some sort of mutation, just as the blank page is actually mutated by the letters traced on it [...].³⁰²

And as it is said that the imaginative faculty grasps what it is that the painter has described on the wall and the memorizing retains the intention of that painting, so this organ has the function of referring and connecting or, better, has that function through which one thing is referred or connected to another: as if they were reciprocally connected through chain rings or similar things.[...] so the cogitative faculty, without hesitation, having set aside every other aspect, chooses what has been determined in order of succession by the same virtue of the distinguishing [...] the distinguishing being a sort of number through which the cogitative faculty approaches in its own way the retained images, dividing them, disaggregating them, gathering them, connecting them, modifying them, forming them, ordering them, relating them from within to the unitary form, everything in proportion to its capacity.³⁰³

³⁰² G. Bruno, 'Cantus Circaeus', in G. Bruno, *Opere Mnemotecniche* I, edited by M. Matteoli, R. Sturlese, N. Tirinnanzi, directed by M. Ciliberto, Adelphi, Milano 2004, p. 678. My translation from Latin, also based on the facing-page Italian translation: «Quo ad Relationem. Subiecta debent intelligi formata, mota, et alterata adventu imaginum: ut easdem valeat commodé repraesentare». Intelligantur inquam affecta, sicuti de facto afficitur pagina per advenientem literam [...].»

³⁰³ G. Bruno, *De umbris idearum*, pp. 98-99. My translation from Latin, also based on the facing-page Italian translation:

«Et sicut imaginativa comprehendere dicitur quid eius quod a pictore est in pariete descriptum, rememorativaque illius picturae retinet intentionem», ita organum istud habet vicem deferentis et applicantis, vel magis eius quo fit delatio, et applicatio istius ad illud, ac si invicem sint colligata, ut accidit in amplexu qui est in annulis cathenarum et similium. [...] ita cogitatio promptissime aliis abactis, determinatum seligit aliud post aliud ipsa scrutinii virtute. [...] Est igitur scrutinium numerus quidam, quo cogitatio tangit modo suo species conservatas, eas pro sua facultate disternendo, disgregando, colligendo, applicando, immutando, formando, ordinando, inque seligendam unitatem referendo».

In addition, insofar as they are subjected to a constant change and, therefore, are not simply retained, they require a more interpretative and hermeneutical attitude. Bruno is also influenced by the Jewish tradition of the Cabala, much of which is based on interpretation and exegesis. As a matter of fact, every image is re-interpreted according to the subsequent relation, and so forth. In the second extract such a re-interpretation is represented as a kind of *distinguishing*, that same Heraclitean virtue from which we derived our notion of γνῶσις. If *distinguishing* is a form of re-interpreting an image through its following relation, ideally the exercise will lead, at the end, to the greatest relation of all, that is, the *unity of nature* or its *intensive* participation in each of its particulars. It is not surprising if Heraclitus was no stranger to Bruno. In the *De umbris idearum*, Bruno cites the famous Heraclitean dictum: «if all things were smoke, we would not distinguish anything»³⁰⁴.

Bruno's *art of memory* goes beyond the Heideggerian claim that «thought is in need of memory, the gathering of thought». In Bruno *memory* is not only a thinking that shelters what needs to be thought, what gives by being concealed. Bruno enacts *memory* as a gathering, a *bringing together* of *shadows* in their infinite relationality that, *intensively* understood, grasp *unity*. What is concealed is not merely sheltered, it is sought-after and creates the “heroic” tension that characterises his way of *dwelling*. It is obvious that Bruno does not intend to build a system that reflects all the possible relations. His *art of memory* is potentially infinite because it reflects the vicissitude of the world in the constant change of its relations. But the more relations this system can represent, the more it tends to the experience of the unity of *nature*, pushed by the love for knowledge.

One last observation regarding the role of *imagination*. In his work *Echoes: After Heidegger*, John Sallis posits a very interesting question, asking whether *imagination* could be thought of as the meaning of Being. Sallis builds his argument

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108. My translation from Latin: «Dixit Heraclitus: "si omnia entia fumus fierent, nares omnia discernent"».

referring to *imagination* mainly in its Kantian significance. Yet, if imagination in Kant could be seen as a bridge between dualisms – what is thought and what is sensed, what is free and what is not free – in Bruno, as we have seen, it even prevents such dualisms from arising. Says Sallis: «How, then, could *imagination* be supposed the meaning of Being? Only insofar as imagination proves to be essentially linked to the horizon of ontological understanding. Only insofar as it can be shown to bear on the very constitution, the opening, of that horizon. In short, only insofar as imagination turns out to be in some respect identical with time»³⁰⁵. By recalling the understanding of time as anticipation and projection in *Sein und Zeit* but also as the grasping of the ecstasies of past, present and future in a unity as the primordial and original time that is finite, we could go as far as to affirm that the existential structure of time that Heidegger provides is mirrored in the Brunian *imagination*, where significant images are gathered in a finite space, moulded by their relations to subsequent images and therefore anticipating, mirroring and containing the infinite universe in a glance. Therefore a unity is captured starting from a finite point of departure but it is also able to project through the infinite potential of the *ars combinatoria*, the mathematical tool applied by the cogitative faculty. Sallis, quoting Heidegger, stresses the productive aspect of *imagination*: «In production one has always already looked ahead to such an image so as then to be able to form the product according to the look thus anticipated. Such an anticipated look, Heidegger says, is precisely what the Greeks mean by εἶδος and ἰδέα. Thus, most remarkably, Heidegger can correlate εἶδος, as image, with imagination: “The anticipated look, the pre image [*Vor-bild*] shows the thing as what it is before the production and as it is supposed to look as a product. The external look has not yet been externalized as something formed, as actual, but rather is the image of imagination [*das Bild der Ein-Bildung*], of φαντασία” (GA 24: 150). Heidegger stresses that such an imaginal sighting is not ancillary to production but rather belongs positively to its structure, indeed, constitutes the very centre of that structure. Imagination thoroughly governs

³⁰⁵ J. Sallis, *Echoes: After Heidegger*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1990, pp. 99-100.

production»³⁰⁶. In the case of Bruno, this is even more evident for not only does *man* explicate his productive faculties through *imagination* in individual and finite cases but he also understands the infinite potentialities of the process offered by the *ars combinatoria*, thus grasping, in a single gaze, the unity of τὰ πάντα.

Section 2 - Hieroglyphics

Heidegger is a philosopher of the *origin*. His works on the Presocratics do not aim at determining what Heraclitus or Parmenides “really said”; they are an attempt to experience their proximity to the origin. A privileged and yet undisclosed path on this potential experience of the origin lies in those words that we are no longer able to listen to. Here I would not claim that we cannot *understand* them, as we do have an understanding of them in terms of their meaning and communicative power. Nevertheless, it is their very semantic intelligibility that makes them distant from us while we persist in a stubborn attempt to discover the meaning of λόγος as the natural language of Φύσις. It is not a problem of meaning or reference – we are not looking for the *object* those words refer to – it is the impossibility for those words to resound in our ears in their originality, which follows our incapacity even to experience what it is for those words to resound; again, we are faced with a sclerosis of the *fourfold*, where the mortals do not hear the voice of the earth, nor do they take care of the gods. Bruno feels that his age also makes it impossible to hear the gods, for it has forgotten ancient wisdom. Inspired by the Hermetic texts, Bruno provides his own take on the origin, going back all the way to Ancient Egypt.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

If the view advanced by Frances Yates in her *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* has depicted Bruno as a Hermetic magician³⁰⁷ more than a philosopher, thus providing a mainly mystical interpretation of his magical theories, we stand with those philosophers and critics, such as Ciliberto, Gatti and Bassi, who have provided a more fruitful reading of what Bruno calls *magic*. Bruno affirms in the *De magia naturalis*:

Such were the figures, so well designed by the Egyptians, which are called hieroglyphics or sacred symbols. These were specific images selected from natural objects and their parts to designate individual things. The Egyptians used these symbols and sounds to converse with the gods to accomplish extraordinary results. Later, when Theuth³⁰⁸, or someone else, invented the letters of the type we use today for other purposes, this resulted in a tremendous loss, first of memory, and then of divine science and magic.³⁰⁹

In this dense passage extrapolated from one of Bruno's essays on *magic* we can find a number of issues that are immediately relevant to our *ethical* purposes, *i.e.* to a practice of *thinking* as inhabiting the *world*, as we saw in Heidegger: *hieroglyphics* as a manifestation of an original inhabiting of the world by the Egyptians, their implications as *images* for the role of *memory* and for our relationship with the *gods* and, finally, the attack on language as alphabetical writing. Again, the Nolan philosopher is addressing unity but the point of departure is always the attention granted to the *minuzzarie*³¹⁰, all the seemingly irrelevant and unimportant things. Even the smallest creature, understood in its infinite relational bonds, expresses *unity*; thus everything has the same dignity in the infinite universe, a *man* just like a donkey

³⁰⁷ «Bruno appears as a Renaissance Magus, proceeding from the Ficino-Pico synthesis (via the *De occulta philosophia* of Agrippa) but shifting the balance so that the Hermetic element is predominant, with the Cabalist and Pseudo-Dionysian elements subservient to the leading Egyptian naturalism». From F. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* [1964], with an introduction by J. B. Trapp, Routledge, London 2002, p. 314.

³⁰⁸ See Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274 c-e, for the legend on the origins of written language,

³⁰⁹ G. Bruno, "On Magic", from G. Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity, and Essays on Magic*, pp. 114-115.

³¹⁰ "odds and ends". A fundamental trait of Bruno's philosophy resides in the constant awareness of the multiplicity in its particulars, even the most irrelevant ones, which possess the same ontological dignity as everything else as pervaded by the World Soul.

or a speck of dust. This ontological uniformity implies something crucial about the ways of searching for truth, which can depart from the contemplation of the infinite universe or a lump of dirt. What draws our attention immediately is, again, *memory* and its relationship to *writing*, which will lead us to an understanding of the reason why the Egyptians and their *hieroglyphics* play such an important role in Bruno's philosophy. As we saw in the previous section, Bruno is quite clear about the fact that order is an essential aspect of the *art of memory*, as retention is based on ordered *images* distributed within psychological spaces (*subiecta*) created for that purpose. Not only are the images derived from *nature*, it is man himself who becomes the growing and productive source of images on nature's behalf; in this sense *memory* is a productive faculty. Simonetta Bassi draws a strong link between this productive aspect of *memory* and *writing* as «the art of memory, Bruno explains, operates just like the graphic arts in its two major applications, *i.e.* painting and writing: as internal painting it builds the images of the things which must be recalled by memory, as internal writing it places them in an architecturally ordered fashion, distributing the signs and the identifying notes. In a few words: memory recreates the world in an artificial space, using and playing with absence»³¹¹. Nevertheless, what is artificial becomes *natural*, for *man* is not abstracted and isolated within his own *subjectivity*. The play of absence allows the ordered system to work as the images, Bassi argues, collected and ordered through signs within the artificial space of *memory*, are signs themselves of a *nature* that cannot be depicted. Images, we should not forget, are nothing but *shadows*, which express the irreducible latency of the truth, that which is *retained* and *kept in safety*. The artificial constitution of the mnemotechnic construction is indeed as natural as the *nature* it represents or, rather, *produces*. The

³¹¹ S. Bassi, *L'arte di Giordano Bruno. Memoria, magia, furore*, Istituto Nazionale per gli Studi sul Rinascimento, Studi e Testi n. 44, Firenze, pp. 55-56. My translation from Italian: «L'arte della memoria, spiega Bruno, opera come l'arte grafica nelle sue due specificazioni maggiori, cioè nella pittura e nella scrittura: come pittura interiore costruisce le immagini delle cose che devono essere richiamate alla memoria, come scrittura interiore le colloca in modo architettonicamente ordinato, distribuendo i segni e le note identificative. Insomma: la memoria ricrea il mondo in uno spazio artificiale, usando e giocando con l'assenza».

concept of “artificial” does not make sense in such a context. That is why we should really make an effort to think, when Bruno – or Bassi, in this instance – refers to an *internal* constitution, this interiority as our own human and creative perspective of exteriority: in other words, *nature* produces its own representation through the human mind. It is exactly this internal writing, as a perspective of identity, that allows the flow of knowledge between *man* and *nature* in their difference and it is in this sense that Bruno attributes a fundamental knowing importance to the *art of memory*. As we saw in the passage from the *De magia*, Bruno severely condemns Theut, the mythical inventor of alphabetical writing, for causing a brusque and devastating interruption of this flow. This condemnation has ancient roots in Plato’s *Phaedrus* and it is definitely not surprising to find it in an author such as Bruno, who had full access to the Platonic material translated by Ficino. Plato’s condemnation of writing is clear and severe and it is intimately related to *memory*, as one of the crucial criticisms is that, due to alphabetical writing, men’s recollection will develop from without and no longer from within themselves³¹². This could be read as an *ante litteram* criticism of the objectification operated upon *nature*, thanks to the loss of a direct contact with it as the closing up of the flow of *memory* from within man. Again, it is not an act of an objectivism against some sort of pre-existing subjectivism – as these two views are coessential – it is the closing up, the interruption of the identity between *man* and *nature*, an identity originally guaranteed by *memory*. Derrida clearly distinguishes between two kinds of memory, one as mere recollection and reproduction and one as a living memory, which we have been calling *productive*:

Thoth is essentially the god of writing, the secretary of Ra and the nine gods, the hierogrammate and the hypomnetographer. Now, it is precisely by pointing out, as we shall see, that the *pharmakon* of writing is good for *hypomnesis* (re-memoration, recollection, consignation) and not for the *mneme* (living, knowing memory) that Thamus, in the *Phaedrus*, condemns it as being of little worth.³¹³

³¹² See Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275a.

³¹³ J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, translated by B. Johnson, Continuum, London 2004, p. 95.

Alphabetical writing interrupts the creative and symbiotic progress of *man* and *nature* guaranteed by oral transmission. Production here is not intended as technological or industrial reproduction or classification but as a constant re-creation of the myths and the legends and of public culture, as used to happen in archaic Greece. Yet we cannot ignore the great paradox of this Platonic condemnation, coming from the very philosopher whose written work will take words such as *justice* and *love* above their vicissitudinal contingencies and envisage a *πολιτεία* where all desire is kept under control and made functional to the Good. Bruno's *art of memory*, as was seen in the previous chapter, proceeds in the opposite direction, as it is exactly a *knowing* and *living memory* that accounts for contingencies, details, particulars, variations that the abstraction of alphabetical writing cannot capture. Words – and even letters – are pushed back to their original function as ever-changing images of *nature* and not as universally valid descriptions of it. Language and words in Bruno's sense end up being *nature's* own act of creation and production.

Here emerges the alternative route Bruno attempts in order to get to the *origin*. What moves Bruno is impressively similar to what moves Heidegger as, at the very opening of the modern age and at the apex of Renaissance culture, he fully perceives the *crisis* the Europe of his time has fallen into – religious wars, obscurantism and fear – culturally and politically, and seeks a way out through his *nova philosophia*, which is, as a matter of fact, a philosophy of the *origin*. Whereas Heidegger seeks the *origin* in the unthought that has given rise to Presocratic philosophy and Western thinking, Bruno goes even further by seeking such origin outside Presocratic thinking – which he nevertheless admires and which he identifies with. In a way the Greeks, by adopting the alphabetical writing, have already lost their *memory* and even though the *λόγος* still resounds in Heraclitus' ears, it has already been delivered outwards, externalized and condemned to oblivion, that very oblivion that, according to Heidegger, will give rise to Western thinking. In Chapter I we saw how Plato shifted from a notion of truth as *unconcealment* to a notion of truth as *correctness* and that was related to a closing up of recollection: the shift is indicative because it is parallel

to the use of alphabetical writing. Heraclitus and Parmenides made use of writing but did that through poetry; Plato, nevertheless, employed dialogue, a further mediation between what is written and the resounding of original words. The *memory* of the Egyptians, on the other hand, is intimately connected to the *Origin*, as their hieroglyphics worked according to a system of images that was recorded in their temples in a «bi-univocal relationship between human mind – populated by the shadows of ideas – and the shadow of the true and the good, the natural image, a relation that is always necessary in a continuous description and production, for the shadow as an image is never something fixed»³¹⁴. Here it is important to grasp the identity between the *practice*, as production of images, and *knowledge* in its necessary shadowy form. If in the *De umbris idearum* Bruno is still partially attached to a Platonic dualism and therefore the *shadows* are dependent on their archetype, from the *De la causa* onwards his monism becomes more and more evident and therefore the *shadows* reveal their independence as the necessary human form of *knowing*, together with their productive role within *nature*. Again, the artificial origin of images as *shadows* of something true and *natural* reveals them to be nothing but a cycle of *natural* production of reality, a cycle that necessarily, *i.e.* ontologically and gnoseologically, includes *man*. That is why Bruno, through his *art of memory*, works towards a practice that could actively reproduce the Egyptian experience. Bruno is not proposing to reintroduce hieroglyphics – which, at the time, were unreadable – he wanted to create a system within his own epoch to be able to get rid of the mediation of alphabetical writing. Bruno forces language within his system of images and breaks its chains by creating a «fantastic logic», as Noferi calls it. Bruno does not care if language cannot express what he achieves with his fantastic logic; as a matter of fact, he says in the *De minimo*, one of his later works:

³¹⁴ S. Bassi, *L'arte di Giordano Bruno. Memoria, magia, furore*, p. 59. My translation from Italian: «[...] una relazione biunivoca fra la mente dell'uomo – popolata dalle ombre delle idee – e l'ombra del vero e del buono, l'immagine naturale, relazione che di necessità è sempre in continuo descriversi e prodursi, dal momento che l'ombra come immagine non è qualcosa di fisso».

we will be inventors, if necessary, of new words, from all different origins, in harmony with the newness of our doctrine. The grammarians subject content to words; we, instead, will subject words to content.³¹⁵

This is a downright attack on the Western philosophical tradition: reversing the relationship between words and content is not a mere inversion of roles, it means that language has lost its privileged standpoint in relation to *nature*. The transcendence of language is annulled by the creative power of *man*. Coinciding with *nature*, man becomes part of a creative process that cannot be reduced to *correctness*, as the «grammarians» would have it: *nature* cannot be ontologically reduced to propositions because propositions ontologically belong to it and such an attack is directed to the advocates of the *adaequatio intellectus ad rem* as much as to the modern thinkers and scientists yet to come. Bruno uncovers *ex ante* the inadequacy of the Cartesian *subject*, isolated from *nature* – which ends up being relegated by rational doubt into the realm of uncertainty – and he consequently rejects any possibility of a mathematical reading of *nature* such as the one that will be advocated by Galileo shortly after his death.

That is why Bruno does not attempt to build a final vocabulary or a fixed system of images: his horizon is always the *infinite* and its vicissitude. He really wishes to inhabit the world in a “more than Copernican” manner and his obsession with the infinite is mirrored in every aspect of the *Nolana Philosophia*, most importantly in his language, as Hilary Gatti points out: «Only by uniting the powers of the reason with those of the imagination would it be possible, in Bruno’s view, to widen the network of possible combinations of alphabets, numbers, geometrical figures, poetical structures, and images in order to catch, in even more sophisticated mental grids susceptible of extension to virtually infinite variations, at least some fragments

³¹⁵ G. Bruno, “De triplici minimo et mensura”, in G. Bruno, *Opera latine conscripta*, edited by F. Tocco and H. Vitelli, Florence 1889, p. 135. My translation from Latin:

«Commodius, vocum authores erimusque novarum.
Grammatici verbis, at nobis verba ministrent,
Ii observent usum, quem nos indicimus ollis».

of a new science»³¹⁶. It comes as no surprise, then, that James Joyce was inspired by Bruno, not only and definitely not most importantly, in terms of stylistic matters³¹⁷. Here we can draw a fundamental link between *thinking*, *writing* and *dwelling*, which partly emerged in the previous chapter on Heidegger. Whether or not Bruno is historically right about the Egyptians being somehow closer to the *origin*, he is not looking for a philological proof; as a matter of fact, he was not – nor was anyone else in his time – aware that hieroglyphics were a system of signs and not just images. Nonetheless, he is transferring that propulsive energy deriving from his encounter with Egyptian culture and mediated by the Hermetic texts to found Western thinking on completely new premises. *Nature* is seen as the cradle of activity and creativity we are ontologically immersed in and not as a divisible, calculable external entity to be exploited through science and technology. Bruno does not reject the present for a nostalgic return to the Egyptian or Presocratic past: his praise and admiration for Copernicus and his discoveries take a completely different stance and direction if compared to what we actually call *modernity*. Bruno is the protagonist of a different *modernity* with respect to his illustrious and immediate successors (Bacon, Galileo, Descartes) and more Copernican than Copernicus himself³¹⁸, as he is the first one to really draw the extreme consequences out of the heliocentric discovery and infer the

³¹⁶ H. Gatti, “Multiple languages of the new science”, in H. Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno*, p. 109.

³¹⁷ Joyce literally embraces Bruno’s ontology, which penetrates deeply into some of the characters in *Ulysses*, not to mention the linguistic experiments of *Finnegan’s Wake*. Joseph Voelker underlines how this results from Joyce borrowing Bruno’s conception of Nature: «Joyce borrowed the complex definition of Nature which all his women to some extent personify from his early idol, Giordano Bruno. Bruno considered Nature a paradoxical entity, an eternal, unchanging substance possessing simultaneously both spiritual and material attributes. As eternal *ens*, it takes upon itself all accidental shapes, from shellfish to emperor, in ceaseless alteration». From J. C. Voelker, “*Nature it is*”: *The Influence of Giordano Bruno on James Joyce’s Molly Bloom*, in *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol. 14, n. 1 (Fall, 1976), pp. 39-48.

³¹⁸ «He called “stupid” those who tried to geometricize nature, that is, to make nature conform to preordained symmetries. He claimed to have understood Copernicus’ theory better than Copernicus himself and the proportional compass better than its inventor, Fabrizio Mordente. More generally, he scorned those who merely measured for measuring sake, or “played with geometry”. For Bruno, as Gatti has pointed out, mathematics is more of an “existential problem” than an “abstract intellectual exercise» from A. Saiber, *Giordano Bruno and the Geometry of Language*, Ashgate, Surrey 2005, p. 46.

infinite universe. We have given a detailed account of such matters in the first part of our work but it was necessary to stress it again in order to understand that Bruno's rediscovery of Ancient Egypt is intimately connected with the new scientific discoveries of his time, which have the potential of evoking the lost identity with *nature*, which was proper to the Egyptians.

For the Egyptians, the divinity was latent in every aspect of *nature*³¹⁹, it was not a *summa* of human excellence; hieroglyphics allowed men to access this immanent divinity and conferred dignity on the world in its multiplicity:

SOPHIA: [...] "Now what evil," questioned Jove, "could he [the Giant, the great antagonist of the gods: *ed.*] have brought to us that could be said to have been conjoined to so great a good? What indignity is there that could have accompanied such a triumph?" Momus answered: "With this he brought about that the Egyptians should come to honour live images of beasts, and should adore us in the form of those, whence we came to be mocked, as I shall tell you". "And this, oh Momus," said Jove, "do not consider as bad, because you know that animals and plants are living effects of Nature; this Nature (as you must know) is none other than God in things".

SAUL: So, *natura est deus in rebus*.

SOPHIA: "However", he said, "diverse living things represent diverse divinities and diverse powers, which, besides the absolute being they possess, obtain the being communicated to all things according to their capacity and measure. Whence all of God is in all things (although not totally, but in some more abundantly and in others less)."³²⁰

In this beautiful passage from *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* [*Lo Spaccio de la bestia trionfante*] Bruno does much more than state his own pantheism inspired by the Egyptian religion. He actually provides a narrative account for the dynamic and differentiating presence of the divinity «not only in a viper and scorpion but also in an onion and garlic»³²¹, a presence that is *intensive*³²² and that, as such, gives an account for the Heraclitean distinguishing of τὰ πάντα within the *unity*. Bruno is not

³¹⁹ Which also seems to be the case of Heraclitus taking care of the gods beside an oven, as we saw in the tale told in the previous chapter.

³²⁰ G. Bruno, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, translated and with an introduction by Arthur D. Imerti, University of Nebraska Press, 2004, p. 235.

³²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 236.

³²² The notion of God's presence in things with different degrees should not suggest the presence of any particular "hierarchy" in nature but the very ontological principle – which is intensive – of their ontic differentiation as beings – which is extensive. For the notions of "intensive" and "extensive" infinite and the "world soul", please refer to Part I, chapter 2 of this work.

asking us to believe in any mystery cult or worship cats, dogs, stones or onions³⁰⁸; he is promoting a kind of *thinking* that is based, on the one hand, on the contemplation of the *infinite* and supported by the new scientific discoveries and, on the other hand, on the actual practice of the *art of memory* that takes into account the world as a unity and as a dynamic multiplicity of reciprocal bonds at once:

In this, however, we need that wisdom and judgement, that skill, industry, and use of intellectual light that are revealed to the world by the intelligible sun, sometimes more and sometimes less, sometimes most greatly and sometimes most minutely. This custom is called Magic, and she, inasmuch as she depends on supernatural³²³ principles, is divine; and, inasmuch as she turns toward the contemplation of Nature and to the scrutiny of her secrets, she is natural.³²⁴

Bruno's practice of *natural magic* is nothing but his understanding of the bonds and relations that constitute *nature*, which was the standard understanding of his time. The novelty he proposes is the experience and manipulation of such bonds through a *language of imagination*, which tries to recover the Egyptian origin through the means and the tools available in his present, the *art of memory*. Thanks to this, he claims that he is able to capture the mystery of the *multiplicity* within the *unity*: «it is these alphabets, numbers, geometric figures, poetic structures, and groups of images working together that showed Bruno the power and interconnectedness beneath the surfaces of all linguistic and symbolic systems. Bruno's philosophy of pluralism, or pluralist philosophy, is a philosophy of the many, the multiple, the vicissitudinal, the possible»³²⁵. As in Heidegger, language for Bruno is neither a *medium* for communication nor a scientific object to be analysed; it is an ontological and *ethical* way of engaging with the *world*, a proper *dwelling*. At this stage we could go as far as to say that, if there is a philosopher who reactivates the Heideggerian *fourfold* and fights the oblivion of the *origin* by actively engaging in *memory* while *taking care of the gods*, it is Giordano Bruno.

³⁰⁸ Bruno would have considered a return to the actual Egyptian religion absurd, yet wished to awaken the *man-nature* relationship, which he thought the Egyptians enjoyed.

³²⁴ G. Bruno, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, p. 239.

³²⁵ A. Saiber, *Giordano Bruno and the Geometry of Language*, pp. 55-56.

Nevertheless, if Heidegger uncovers the oblivion of Being through the positing of the *Seinsfrage* and, as we saw in the previous section, he affirms that «thought is in need of memory», he fails to complete his job. Such failure depends on the fact that *memory* is essential for *thinking* as a renovated practice of the *origin* but, as *memory*, it is not characterized by a convincing horizon and it is limited to the restricted and elitist access to Being provided by Hölderlin's poetry. Bruno, on the other hand, organizes his thought with the aim of being able to embrace anything that is seemingly irrelevant, odds and ends, *minuzzarie*, and in a way that any element in *nature* and any perspective could provide access to a truth that is always vicissitudinal, always in transit, as it is *nature* producing and creating itself through an act of knowing, which is, in fact, the *art of memory* as we have encountered it. Furthermore Heidegger, in his criticism of modern science and technology, has to assume the history of metaphysics as a uniform destiny and can only see the Copernican revolution as the Nietzschean slope leading us towards X, towards nihilism. Bruno, who belongs by historical and philosophical right to that revolution, is the advocate of a modernity that never saw the light of day, historically speaking, but that was potentially on the way.

With the help of Bruno, then, we can finally give a better account of the Heraclitean tales reported by Heidegger, which we examined in the last chapter. We saw the connection between Heraclitus *taking care of the gods* beside an oven and Heraclitus playing dice with some adolescents, while rejecting his fellow citizens' invitation to take part in the life of the πόλις. Heraclitus, just like Bruno, is taking care of *minuzzarie* and yet, we established with Heidegger, he was practising the *essence of politics*³²⁶. Bruno's *art of memory* provides a proximity to *nature* akin to

³²⁶ «And what if – thinking in a Greek way – the preoccupation with the gods' presence coincided instead with the highest preoccupation for the πόλις? That is actually the way it is: as a matter of fact the πόλις, always thought in a Greek way, is the centre and the place around which revolves the manifestation of everything that is essentially being and therefore also the non-essence of everything that is. If it is so, then, [...] the thinker that takes care of the essential proximity of the gods is the man who is authentically “political”», from M. Heidegger, “Heraklit. Der Anfang des

the one encountered in Heraclitus, precisely through giving up on any ontological superiority of man over *nature* and yet providing him with the power of being the immediate *productive* and *creative* perspective of *nature* itself. This emerges practically in Bruno's own view of *politics*, which we can consider as *essential* as the Heraclitean attitude. As Saverio Ansaldi writes:

For Bruno, the *material constitution* of human activity should not rid itself of natural necessity in order to legitimate and justify its own power – as will be the case with the great authors of the 17th century, Hobbes and Locke, for instance. The human order always corresponds to the natural order, always belongs to that order, since it is the result of the freedom and autonomy of human power. In this sense, the human effort and labour do not produce “things” whose intrinsic value resides precisely in their essential difference with natural things. On the contrary, human activity – and the “labour” of human power – has no sense other than being capable of weaving and constituting “bonds” with the infinite power of material nature.³²⁷

In this sense provided by Bruno, Heraclitus' stove is not an artificial *thing*, a mere object, but a place for the gods to be found. The same applies to the πόλις and political activity, which becomes a sterile activity once it loses its proximity to *nature*.

abendländischen Denkens”, in M. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. II. Abteilung: Vorlesungen 1923-1944* [1979], pp. 11-12. See n. 261 for the original text.

³²⁷ S. Ansaldi, *Giordano Bruno. Une philosophie de la métamorphose*, Classiques Garnier, Paris 2010, pp. 124-5. My translation from French: «Chez Bruno, la *constitution matérielle* de l'activité humaine ne doit pas d'affranchir de la nécessité naturelle pour légitimer et justifier sa puissance – comme ce sera le cas chez les grands auteurs de XVII^e siècle, Hobbes et Locke par exemple. L'ordre humain relève toujours de l'ordre naturel, il appartient toujours à cet ordre, tout en étant le résultat de la liberté et de l'autonomie de la puissance humaine. En ce sens, l'effort et le travail humains ne produisent pas des ‘choses’ dont la valeur intrinsèque réside précisément dans leur différence essentielle avec les choses naturelles. Au contraire, l'activité humaine – le ‘travail’ de la puissance humaine – n'a de sens que s'il est capable de tisser et de constituer des ‘liens’ avec la puissance infinie de la nature matérielle».

Chapter IX – Unity and multiplicity

Section 1 – Power and creation

Both in the Heideggerian interpretation of Heraclitus and in Bruno the *ethical* is directed, in the end, to an appreciation of particular things. The reason for such a convergence lies in the fact that our *dwelling* is dependent on how immediate our relation to the world is, so much so that a stove, a child's game and other *minuzzarie* somehow become more essential than public assemblies. More essential here means closer to *nature* and to that *thinking of the origin* we have been after; in Spinoza, nonetheless, it also means more *powerful*. Empowerment does not derive from authority or in virtue of an institutional and imposing order, contexts that bind man to a situation of subjugation for they are violent and imposing. If *man* has to be empowered and free, we saw that bondage should be enhanced through a direct and immediate appreciation of *nature*, which is achieved through the practice of the *art of memory* as the creation and representation of the most fundamental bonds. This is what Bruno called *natural magic*, the practice of bringing down the abstractions of language through the power of *imagination*. We had left Spinoza dismissing *imagination* as the characteristic faculty of a fragmentary and inadequate knowledge, thus inappropriate for an understanding of particular things, something that not even *common notions* could provide. We have thus left unresolved how what Spinoza calls *knowledge of the third kind* could enlighten us on *particular things*, in order to develop our discourse on *ethics*. As a matter of fact, in Heidegger the *ethical* discourse, understood as *dwelling*; took us to the exploration of *things*, thus resulting in the *fourfold*. Heidegger's understanding of a *thing* through the *fourfold* also embraced the *essence of the political*, as what is essentially political does not correspond to an institutional arrangement of power but to *taking care of the gods*, thus re-activating our proximity to *nature* by rejecting the technological interpretation of the world, which amounts to ceasing to treat things as *objects*. In this complex

framework, all the elements hold one another *omni-relationally*, for understanding *ethics* as *dwelling* and *inhabiting* requires us to be able to think more than one thought at once. *The practice of ethics* reveals itself to be much more and something radically different from a dialogue among different cultures, religions and political systems on how to live one's life: *inhabiting* requires us to stop reducing the world to a bunch of rational counterparts discussing what is best to do. This is the overcoming of Admetus' solution: *dialogue* as reducing to *reason* corresponds to abstraction, thus to the loss of an understanding of *particular things in their essence*, thereby to a *loss of power*. This means that, as long as *ethics* is merely understood as an *extensive* arrangement of *objects*, behaviours and abstract – institutional – relations between people, it cannot provide us with any freedom or power, just with violence and oppression.

In a text called *Subversive Spinoza* [*Spinoza sovversivo*] Antonio Negri presents Spinoza as a possibility for liberation, attacking directly the *extensive* understanding of time: «Spinoza's philosophy rejects time-as-measurement. It captures time-as-life. This is the reason why Spinoza ignores the word "time" – although he does fix its meaning between life and imagination. As a matter of fact, for Spinoza time does not exist except as liberation. Freed time turns into productive imagination, rooted in ethics. Freed time is neither becoming nor dialectics nor mediation. It is being that gets built, dynamic constitution, fulfilled imagination. Time is not measure but ethics. Thus imagination reveals the hidden dimensions of Spinozist being – of this ethical being that is being of the revolution, continuous ethical choice of production»³²⁸. Negri puts forth an unexpected thesis, by associating *imagination* with the

³²⁸ A. Negri, "Spinoza sovversivo", in A. Negri, *Spinoza* [1998], with forewords by G. Deleuze, P. Macherey and A. Matheron, Derive e Approdi, Roma 2006, pp. 292-293. My translation from Italian: «La filosofia di Spinoza esclude il tempo-misura. Essa coglie il tempo-vita. È per questo che Spinoza ignora la parole "tempo" – pur fissando il suo concetto fra vita e immaginazione. Infatti per Spinoza il tempo non esiste che come liberazione. Il tempo liberato si fa immaginazione produttiva, radicata nell'etica. Il tempo liberato non è né divenire, né dialettica, né mediazione. Ma essere che si costruisce, costituzione dinamica, immaginazione realizzata. Il tempo non è misura ma etica. Così l'immaginazione svela le dimensioni nascoste dell'essere spinoziano – di questo essere etico che è l'essere della rivoluzione, continua scelta etica di produzione».

overcoming of *duration* and therefore of the *extensive* perspective. In Chapter VIII we considered John Sallis' hypothesis that *imagination* could somehow be the meaning of *Being* but only under certain conditions, namely «only insofar as imagination proves to be essentially linked to the horizon of ontological understanding. Only insofar as it can be shown to bear on the very constitution, the opening, of that horizon. In short, only insofar as imagination turns out to be in some respect identical with time»³²⁹. In Bruno we saw how the *art of memory* adopts a standpoint where time is identified with a systematically projecting play of *images* and not with *duration*. Grasping the relational nature of images as a mirror of the universe allows Bruno to acquire the ontological tension towards an understanding of the *One*. In *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, Heidegger brings up, with respect to time, the role of *memory* as a thinking that re-produces the tension between what is concealed or retained and what is actual in virtue of being a *gift*:

The *remembering awaiting* (remembering a concealed belongingness to be-ing, awaiting a call of be-ing) puts to decision the whether or not of the onset of be-ing. More clearly: temporalizing as this joining of the (hesitating) self-refusal grounds the domain of decision in according to the ab-ground. However, with the removal-unto what does not grant itself (that is after all what is ownmost to temporalizing), everything would already be decided. But what does not grant itself refuses itself hesitantly; in this manner it grants the possibility of *gifting* [italics mine] and enowment.³³⁰

Time as “temporalizing” is the dimension of the *gift*, which is such only insofar as temporalizing is understood within the tension of *memory*, the recalling of what is retained or hesitantly «self-refused». If the Heideggerian *thing* has to be understood as *gift*, it has to be in virtue of what is self-refused, which on the other hand hesitates by revealing and delivering itself as *temporalized*. In the *Contributions* this is what Heidegger calls the *ab-ground*, the essential sway of time-space onto what is retained. However, if such «temporalizing» is understood as removing and obliterating what is retained, then it amounts to mere *duration*, in which everything is

³²⁹ J. Sallis, *Echoes: After Heidegger*, pp. 99-100.

³³⁰ M. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, p. 268.

«already decided». Thus, what we have called the perspective of *extension*, which is that of *imagination*, is a deficient one only insofar as it is not understood in terms of *memory*, which requires a role for time that is not the one of mere *duration*. This also affects the status of *imagination*, which could be isolated by a merely durational understanding or be activated by a *mnemonic* one: this is, from the perspective of the understanding, the difference between the *object* and the *thing*. In Spinoza this translates into the understanding of *essences of particular things*, which are not understood extensively, *i.e.* under the point of view of duration. *Particular things* understood *intensively* require *time* to adopt the perspective of what is retained, namely of *substance*, for *particular essences* are nothing but degrees of God's *power*. This perspective, in Spinoza, is nothing but the understanding of things *sub specie aeternitatis*. We shall see that in Spinoza *imagination* will not only be a prerogative of inadequate knowing but that, under similar circumstances to the ones outlined above, it will proceed all the way to *intuition* as the *knowledge of the third kind*.

We have encountered *imagination* in Spinoza as the characteristic feature of a fragmentary and inadequate knowledge, *i.e.* the *knowledge of the first kind* and, nonetheless, we saw that Negri presents it as the ultimate *ethical* attitude, the highest form of proximity to being and therefore a source of freedom and power. We saw at the end of Chapter VI, quoting Pr. 28 in Part V of the *Ethics*, how that kind of *intuition* describing what Spinoza calls *knowledge of the third kind* could only be desired and achieved through the exercise of the *second kind* and not of the *first* as, of the two, only *common notions* can provide us with *adequate ideas*, as Spinoza describes in the proof of that same proposition:

This proposition is self-evident. For whatever we understand clearly and distinctly, we understand either through itself or through something else which is conceived through itself. That is, ideas which are clear and distinct in us or which are related to the third kind of knowledge (Sch. 2, Pr. 40, II) cannot follow from fragmentary or confused ideas which (same Sch.) are related to the second kind of knowledge, but from adequate ideas, that is (same Sch.) from the second or third kind of knowledge. [...]³³¹

³³¹ B. Spinoza, "Ethics", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 375.

In virtue of this proposition we strengthened our idea that Spinoza's *Ethics* provides us with the means to achieve *knowledge of the third kind* because having adequate ideas of *nature* and *God*, understanding their ontological structure through *reason* as expressed by the *mos geometricus*, steers our *conatus*, our desire to pursue adequate ideas. This means that, if we really understood the *Ethics*, we could not be content with reading it. This is evident also from the fact that the mind thrives with happiness when it experiences ideas in their *adequacy* and therefore a mind furnished with adequate ideas will be drawn to wish for more. Furthermore, we saw that in Spinoza truth never comes across as *correspondence*, given that there is no standard to match an adequate idea: either truth is its own reward or it is not truth at all. That is what Spinoza means by *clear and distinct*, which is another way of saying *adequate*. In the end, there seems to be no place for *imagination*. Nevertheless, we should not forget that *imagination* as *knowledge of the first kind* is not an utter gnosiological failure: the ideas it provides are, indeed, fragmentary and *inadequate*, but they do contain some knowledge about particular things and, ethically, they do not correspond to an unreal or false condition. The ethical condition is one of subjugation and passivity with respect to particular things, thus a real and concrete one. *Imagination*, as opposed to *reason*, provides us with a contact, however *passive*, with *particular things*, which is something *reason* alone cannot provide and without which no adequate ideas could ever be had. As a matter of fact, Lloyd comes to the aid of Negri by quoting his *Savage Anomaly* and giving credit to this position: «The world of passion and imagination comes into view as fitting object for rational investigation. “Reason traverses the imagination, liberating the truth it contains, and meanwhile the imagination constructs the passivity of the existent and, therefore, of reason itself” (Negri 1981:106). Negri's interpretation of the relation between Spinozistic reason and imagination captures something important – that for Spinoza the power of

imagination is both constructive and destructive»³³². This twofold role of the *imagination* was envisaged earlier, when it was presented with the option of understanding itself through *duration* or *eternity* or, to use Heidegger's terms, of *remembering* its belongingness to what is *concealed* or self-refused.

It may seem counterintuitive to investigate how there could be any productive faculty within an ontological setting where our minds and bodies are determined by causal chains that do not allow for any initiative of this sort, let alone “constructing being” in any sense. Nevertheless, this kind of reasoning is misleading, for it is only legitimate from the point of view of a Cartesian *subject*, where productive initiative is left to the individual's choice. The causal chains do not just bind the individual mode, they determine its very existence by affecting it. Furthermore, their productive drive is nothing but the *power* of their individual essence, which is not the prerogative of a metaphysically conceived individual but a degree of *nature's* own power. Conceiving causal relations as mechanical impacts between existing *objects* amounts to misunderstanding *nature* in Spinoza. In Heidegger, *Being* delivers itself historically, in the *being-there* of *truth*, thus also understanding *nature* as Φύσις, as growth. The whole issue lies, again, in the understanding: either the understanding of this delivery is a mere projection of a *subject* upon the world or it is a projection of *nature*, the *openness* onto which what is retained can deliver its *gift*. Says Heidegger in the *Contributions*:

Whoever ever wants to face the history of be-ing and intends to experience how be-ing stays away in its own essential sphere [*Wesensraum*] and for a long time abandons its sphere to what is precisely not its ownmost – which drives the propagation of “beings” before itself in order even to preserve what is not ownmost unto what is ownmost to which it does belong – such a one must be able to grasp above all that project-openings are thrown into *that* which, thanks to their clearing, again becomes a being and only tolerates be-ing as an addendum to it, an addendum that “abstraction” had devised.³³³

³³² G. Lloyd, *Spinoza and the Ethics*, p. 64.

³³³ M. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, p. 315.

The «propagation of “beings”» before *Being* is intended as the obliteration of the essential sphere, of what is retained and kept safe and it amounts to abstracting things and understanding them as *objects*. Such obliteration is part of the historical delivery of *Being* itself as *metaphysics*, according to Heidegger. On the other hand, the re-activation of what has been obliterated, the essential sphere that is retained, is also part of the historical delivery conceived as a *mnemonic* act. In Spinoza, the movement is analogous, although not expressed in historical terms but in terms of *eternity*: the only way for the essential sphere of *substance* to reveal what is retained – what is *intensively* understood – is the *intuition* of adequate ideas. The mind adopts *intuition* as *knowledge of the third kind* by understanding *particular things* as *essences*, as degrees of God’s *power*. Through this very understanding, it understands itself as *powerful*, *i.e.* as belonging to the sphere of *essences*. It sees itself *sub specie aeternitatis*. The standpoint of *eternity* is not alternative to a historical delivery of *Being*. Only a mechanical reading of Spinoza would reduce the modal reality to a merely causal network of *objects*. There are causal relations, indeed, but they do not occur between *objects*, for modes are not *objects*. Modes are not simply bound by causal chains, they are affected and relationally constituted by them, as we have already seen in Chapter III: the capacity of affecting and being affected constitutes their essence. Historical events are delivered as affections of *substance* in a particular moment and place. From the point of view of eternity, though, they affect the course of history proportionally to the intensity of their power. Therefore, just like in Heidegger, the very obliteration of the standpoint of *Being/substance* is a particular delivery/expression of *Being/substance* itself. This amounts to saying that ages dominated by superstition and fear will be understood through the *knowledge of the first kind*. Ages dominated by reason and science will be understood through the *knowledge of the second kind*. Ideally, the philosopher is a historical expression of a *dwelling* that takes the standpoint of what is retained by standing in the *openness of the clearing*. It is the standpoint of *eternity* that recalls what is «ownmost» to *Being*. In Spinoza’s terms, it is an understanding that occurs *sub specie aeternitatis*, thus

reaching the *intellectual love of God* «which arises from the third kind of knowledge» and «is eternal» (*Ethics*, Pr. 33, part V)³³⁴. *Man*, in that case, becomes the centre of intensity of *nature*'s growth and production. On the other hand, as we saw earlier, wherever *subject* is perceived as *substratum*, history is seen as a tool in its hands. The *subject* is not bound by causal relations but by choice: abstraction places on our shoulders the responsibility of an alleged autonomous decision. Production becomes technological and “industrial”, for it is the result of dominion upon an objectified nature. Whenever *man* is an *affection* of *nature* and he is himself affected, instead, he is an expression of a degree of power that is his *essence*. It is God himself or nature – *Deus sive natura* – that expresses a certain degree of power. The *conatus* of each mode, one's striving to retain one's own existence, can express itself in virtue of the fact that we are not isolated *objects* but we are at the mercy of other affections. Bruno's *natural magic* rests on very similar premises: through *imagination* and the *art of memory*, *shadows* – the images of a truth that is revealed through its latency – are composed through a synthetic mathematics that “constructs” *being* through its imaginative – and not imaginary – organization. The contemporary examples of television and of the internet, with its logic of icons and links, may suggest how we can master the imagination. Still, this parallel is insufficient because it is dependent upon a support dictated by technology. The images we master depend on algorithms and calculations; they provide pre-determined paths. They end up impoverishing us and making us dependent and weak, thus far from the expression of our *essence*. As a matter of fact, Spinoza's *knowledge of the third kind*, achieved in the first instance through the aid of synthetic logical reasoning, needs to do without it in the end and become pure *intuition*.

A few remarks on the mind. If we keep on seeing the *mind* as a *support*, as if it were a RAM or a hard disk or a *subject*, for that matter, we shall keep on stumbling on abstraction. The reason is simple: if the *mind* is seen as a container or device for ideas, not only does it come to bear an unfounded ontological status but all ideas will

³³⁴ B. Spinoza, “Ethics”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 377.

automatically become *objects* for it and thus be subject to a necessary abstraction: that is the reason why we cannot go as far as knowing particular things. Spinoza does not grant the *mind* a different status from that of an *idea*, the *idea of our body*. As Filippo Mignini rightly observes: «Not only is the mind a mode and not substance, but it has not got any absolute faculty of understanding, desiring, loving, etc.: the mind considered as the faculty of ideas is a fiction (E 2 P48S: GII, 129, 20-27). In Prop. 49 of *Ethics*, Part 2, it is stated that intellect and will (the two faculties that according to Descartes constitute the mind) are nothing but volitions and determinate ideas. Therefore the mind is defined in relation to its ideas and not ideas in relation to mind. It is symptomatic that Spinoza did not, at the beginning of the second part, formulate an explicit definition of the mind, although he does define the notion of body»³³⁵. The *mind* conceived as a *support* is an *ens rationis* at best for Spinoza; as the *idea of the body* it is a phenomenological awareness of the affections of the body, although not a specific and certain knowledge of the body's composition; whatever happens to the body, happens as well to the mind because they are the same thing seen in the light of two different attributes. As Spinoza establishes in Pr. 1 of Part V:

The affections of the body, that is the images of things, are arranged and connected in the body in exactly the same way as thoughts and the ideas of things are arranged and connected in the mind.³³⁶

Nevertheless, Spinoza claims that the *mind* can, in its own right, have *adequate ideas of particular things* by understanding them *sub specie aeternitatis*. We should

³³⁵ F. Mignini, "L'intendere è un puro patire. Passività e attività della conoscenza in Spinoza", in *La Cultura*, Year 25, n. 1 (1987), p. 142. My translation from Italian: «Non solo la mente è modo e non sostanza (cfr. 4.8), ma non ha alcuna facoltà assoluta di intendere, desiderare, amare, ecc.: la mente considerata come facoltà delle idee è una finzione (E 2 P48S: GII, 129, 20-27). In E 2 P49CD si afferma che l'intelletto e la volontà (ossia le due facoltà che secondo Descartes costituiscono la mente) non sono nulla al di fuori delle volizioni e delle idee determinate. Dunque la mente si definisce in relazione alle sue idee e non le idee in relazione alla mente. È sintomatico che Spinoza non abbia, all'inizio della seconda parte, formulato un'esplicita definizione di mente, mentre definisce la nozione del corpo».

³³⁶ B. Spinoza, "Ethics", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 365.

assume, then, that the body could theoretically experience things *sub specie aeternitatis* as well, although, in Pr. 21 of Part V, Spinoza affirms:

The mind can exercise neither imagination nor memory save while the body endures.³³⁷

The *body* is at the mercy of affects as long as it endures and so is the *mind*; thus in our finiteness we are not provided with any special device called *mind* that, in virtue of its power, can act upon reality: our *extensive* is itself the explication of our *power*, our being *active*. As Deleuze rightly points out, «affections (*affectio*) are the modes themselves. The modes are affections of substance or of its attributes (*Ethics*, I, 25, Cor.; I, 30, dem.). These affections are necessarily active, since they are explained by the nature of God as adequate cause, and God cannot be acted upon. At a second level, the affections designate that which happens to the mode, the modifications of the mode, the effects of other modes on it. These affections are therefore images or corporeal traces first of all (*Ethics*, II, post. 5; II, 17, schol.; III, post. 2); and their *ideas* involve both the nature of the affected body and that of the affecting, external body (II, 16). “The affections of the human body whose ideas present external bodies as present in us, we shall call images of things [...] And when the mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines”»³³⁸. As affections of *substance*, our existence is the witness of our power and of our being active and such power includes all the affects that concur in its increase or decrease, the bodies involved in such activity as the causes of those affects and their own power. As Spinoza affirms in Axiom 2 of Part V,

The power of an effect is defined by the power of the cause insofar as its essence is explicated or defined through the essence of the cause.³³⁹

This axiom follows from Pr. 7 in Part III:

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

³³⁸ G. Deleuze, *Spinoza. Practical Philosophy*, p. 48.

³³⁹ B. Spinoza, “Ethics”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 365.

The conatus with which each thing endeavours to persist in its own being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself.³⁴⁰

The existence of a mode is the explication of its *conatus*, its striving for existence. Imagination falls into confusion because it cannot account for all the images that make up one's affects, a situation that results in passive emotions and therefore in a decrease of power. From the perspective of *infinity*, nevertheless, our body and our mind do not exist in a particular moment, with a specific size or abilities; they *are in essence*, meaning that they are *eternal in God*, they are a degree of his power. That is the only way to account for the *singularity* of a *mode* in all of its affects, *i.e.* intensively. Any isolated image or group of isolated images that make up the story of a mode and include each detail of our life will only be an extensive and untruthful picture of a succession of events. Therefore intuiting the *essence of particular things* is not a matter of analyzing affects and representing the causal chain of an event. We can only *intuit* what affects us in its *essence* because what affects us *defines our power as our very essence is defined by what affects us* (by Axiom 2, Part V). The real, *ethical* effort, then, lies in whether *particular things* are in agreement or not with us: in the first case our *power* is also defined by what causally affects us, thus making us happy; in the second case our *power* is diminished, thus making us sad. From the *extensive* point of view, an affect remains the same but how we understand it reflects the expression of our *essence*. I shall provide an example. If someone breaks my heart and I cannot explain myself why, it will affect me negatively and I shall throw myself into despair. On the other hand, if I deal with it through *reason* and understand the causes of what has brought me to this situation – “my cowardice or my partner's selfishness and their consequences”, for instance – I might reach an adequate idea of the situation – “a relation generally needs a certain amount of courage and tolerance”, for example – learn from experience and suffer less. In the final instance, I could be quite used to heartbreaks and each time I have managed to deal with them in a

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

rational way, understanding the causes and finding a remedy but always in virtue of *common notions* that tell me how relationships function but telling me nothing about the *particular affect* I have suffered. This time it still hurts and in a particularly intense way, even though I know everything there is to know about relationships. Thus I come back to the images and the sensations of this particular instance, all those elements that make this misadventure real and existent: nothing changes in terms of how they depict the situation to a confused understanding *of the first kind*, *extensively* we are facing the same situation. The confusion and fragmentation of the first times is easily overcome by *reason*. But the *intensity* and the vividness of those images and sensations are still there and it is clear to me why. At the beginning of my unlucky history of heartbreaks, I was unable to deal with the confusion of my imagination, then I understood the causes of my suffering and imposed some order, which means that from the first heartbreak to now my *power* has increased and my suffering has been dealt with: all the heartbreakers have done to me and the heartbreakers themselves have *empowered* me. Reaching this conclusion, I no longer need to make sense of my last, intense heartbreak: I can feel its intensity and understand that it is a new and powerful expression of my existence. If an *effect* is understood by its *cause*, then, I have to understand myself through my heartbreaker and recognize that *myself* and my *affects* are my existence, which is always an affection of *substance*, *i.e.* an active expression of my *essence*. What made images and sensations confused in the first instance of heartbreak was the fact that I understood them as something external and foreign to the understanding of myself; but, as an affection of *substance*, I only exist through what affects me and the causes of such affects, I am not an *isolated subject*.

Negri's claims that «imagination reveals the hidden dimensions of Spinozist being – of this ethical being that is being of the revolution, continuous ethical choice of production» and that «reason traverses the imagination, liberating the truth it contains, and meanwhile the imagination constructs the passivity of the existent and, therefore, of reason itself» seem to acquire a clearer significance now. *Imagination* is

the raw material of our living in the world amongst things and other people; *reason* allows us to manage the *affects* that we know through imagination; *intuition* produces *being* by recognizing the raw material provided by the imagination as an active expression of our *essence*. *Creation* does not amount to the production of *objects*; it amounts to an affirmation of *being sub specie aeternitatis*. If through reason I get to an understanding of the causes of my affects, it is only through *intuition* that I can grasp, in a single gaze, the *multiplicity* of the affects that constitute my individuality as the “tip of an iceberg” – just like *unity* in Bruno is grasped through the constituting ordering of relations. *Particular things* exist as affections of *substance* only in virtue of the fact that they affect other *modes* and I understand them only as I am *affected* by them. Nonetheless, the reverse is just as valid: *I* exist only in virtue of the fact that I am affected by *particular things* and *I affect* them, for I am myself a *mode*. Whenever I act upon another mode, I extensively express my *power* and whenever I am acted upon, I am affected by something else’s *power*. Nevertheless, *power is always active*, for the reason that it is itself *essence*, thus a degree of the *infinite power of substance*. What we infer from this fact is that there cannot be any conflicting *essences*, although they may seem so in their *extensive* expression, otherwise that would imply that an *essence* can be passively acted upon and that is absurd. What *intuition* provides me with is exactly the awareness that *particular essences* are *modes* seen in the manner in which they affirm their existence on other *modes*. If I get stabbed, I am obviously weakened in that particular instance; as long as I understand this event as a contingent case of conflicting forces in which I succumb, my body is wounded and my mind is filled with confused images and emotions of pain. If those images are understood from the point of view of *eternity*, nevertheless, the fact that I get stabbed stops being a fact which happened in a certain moment and under certain circumstances, it is understood in the timeless necessity of the causes that made it happen not now, not tomorrow, not yesterday: from the point of view of *substance* the event is *eternal*. So is my *essence*, of which getting stabbed and not getting stabbed, being loved and getting my first heartbreak are *particulars* understood under a species of *eternity* and

through their causes: my stabber, my lover and my heartbreaker. *Power* does not fight *power*, *essence* does not fight *essence*; they overlap eternally and are responsible for our existence as affected affections. *Particular essences* are not distinguished within *substance* for, if they were, no *mode* could ever be affected by another *mode*, *i.e.* it *could not exist*. It may seem absurd to consider the understanding of seemingly dreadful events *sub specie aeternitatis* as *beatitude* and yet, as I once was healthy and thriving, now that I am stabbed and heartbroken, I can only understand myself through the causes of my states, which all empower me as long as and because they are adequately understood through God, as Spinoza affirms in *Ethics* V, Pr. 32:

We take pleasure in whatever we understand by the third kind of knowledge, and this is accompanied by the idea of God as a cause.

Proof From this kind of knowledge there arises the highest possible contentment of the mind (Pr. 27, V), that is (Def. of Emotions 25) the highest possible pleasure, and this is accompanied by the idea of oneself, and consequently (Pr. 30, V), by the idea of God, as cause.

Corollary From the third kind of knowledge there necessarily arises the intellectual love of God [*amor Dei intellectualis*]. For from this kind of knowledge there arises (preceding Pr.) pleasure accompanied by the idea of God as cause, that is (Def. of Emotions 6), the love of God not insofar as we imagine him as present (Pr. 29, V) but insofar as we understand God to be eternal. And this is what I call the intellectual love of God.³⁴¹

That is the reason why Spinoza claims that «the more we understand particular things, the more we understand God», as the more particular things I understand, the more I am identified as a point of *intensity* where the *power* of particular things concentrates and the more I coincide with God himself *sub specie aeternitatis*. As Ansaldi rightly observes: «That is how the life of bodies is eternal: as a matter of fact, the God of Love cannot but conceive the eternal power of bodies or their essence, while the mind that knows *sub specie aeternitatis* cannot but conceive its own body under the eternity of its power»³⁴². Our *particular power* is the *power* of what affects

³⁴¹ B. Spinoza, “Ethics”, in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 377.

³⁴² S. Ansaldi, *Nature et puissance. Giordano Bruno et Spinoza*, p. 122. My translation from French: «La vie des corps est ainsi éternelle: en effet, le Dieu de l’Amour ne peut que concevoir la

us but the same is valid for the *modes* that affect us: we grant them existence by affecting them. *Creation* is the increased *power* of acting resulting from the elimination of any fictional barrier: my *mind* and my *body* are neither a container nor a device; thus *imagination* is only fragmentary and confused when it is fictionally isolated. On the other hand, when those images are understood as constituting my *mind* through other *modes*, thus overcoming the distinction between me and another mode, which is merely *numerical* and not *real*, my *power* of acting becomes as great as my understanding in this sense is wide.

That is what I take Spinoza to mean by intuitively grasping *particular essences*, the gnosiological realization of the identity of *knower* and *known* through an *ethical* effort. I would not read Spinoza's ethical conclusions, then, as a retreat from life and a rejection of emotions; on the contrary, I believe he promotes a total and radical involvement in the vicissitude of the world. Spinoza makes it quite explicit in the incipit of his last, unfinished work, the *Political Treatise*, which sounds like a condemnation of moralists and a praise of human passions: «Philosophers look upon the passions by which we are assailed as vices, into which men fall through their own fault. So it is their custom to deride, bewail, berate them, or, if their purpose is to appear more zealous than others, to execrate them»³⁴³. We saw how Bruno himself conceived the approach to particular things as an *imaginative* one that would do without the abstracting mediation of language but that could be achieved only through a *logic of images*. Such a *logic of images* is one of the tools of *natural magic*, for it reveals the *bonds* that relate one thing to another and allows us to relate directly to as many *particular things* as possible: that is the way to access to the *divine* and not the abstractions of *genera* or *species*. Alternatively, the strongest bond of all, the *bond of Love*, so intense as to drive us to madness, leads us to the destiny of Actaeon, being devoured by *nature*, the very aim of our research. Nevertheless, both for Bruno and for Spinoza the aim is really to be able to *dwell* in the vicissitude of the world by

puissance éternelle des corps ou la perfection de leur essence, tandis que l'âme qui connaît *sub specie aeternitatis* ne peut concevoir l'essence de son corps que dans l'éternité de sa puissance».

³⁴³ B. Spinoza, "Political Treatise", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 680.

trying to demonstrate, whether through the World Soul or *substance*, that nothing is isolated from *nature*. Our pretence of acting by individual choice or dominating *nature* itself through the arbitrary constitution of a *subject* not only amounts to fooling ourselves, for it is a plain absurdity, but it makes us weaker and unhappy. To establish why Heidegger could not see how such philosophies converge in his *ethical* addressing of *dwelling*, by undermining the metaphysical premises of *technological* violence, would require a whole new work but we are here to establish that they do. It is sufficient, then, to take a last look at Heidegger's *jug* now, as we encountered it in Chapter VII: the *jug*, as a *thing* whose *essence* has to be looked for in the fourfold of *earth, sky, mortals and divinities*. All the *extensive* standards that «make the jug-thing into a nonentity in not permitting things to be the standard for what is real» disappear if we see the *jug* in the light of Bruno and Spinoza. In the understanding of the jug is its outpouring, its being empty, its satisfying the thirst of the mortal, its earthly fabric, its smashing on the floor, all affects that are understood in their living significance as *gift* that intensively expresses the *power* of all its affects. The *god* acquires a precise role within the *fourfold* as the relation to the *totality*, the *One*, which is what is kept safe and retained in our relation to the *jug*³⁴⁴. Reducing the *jug* to an *object* isolates us by obstructing any access to an *ethical* involvement with *nature*, to *dwelling*, thus making us weak and lonely before it. That is why *man*, the *mortal*, can only understand himself in *essence* within the *fourfold*, which means only from the point of view of *eternity*, that is the standpoint of *unity* and *totality*. What Lewis says of Heidegger in this respect, then, might be said of Spinoza as well: «Man dies insofar as he is attuned to the singularity of beings: only insofar as he lives but once only can

³⁴⁴ As Lewis puts it: «Only those beings which to an extent withdraw from totality are pliant enough to allow the passage of the god as the look that looks out for the earthen aspect of the thing. Therefore, to understand what this “passing” involves would be to understand the position god occupies with respect to beings and therefore to being. The god can distinguish itself from being only by relating to those *special* beings which are fit for this. A hint requires a withdrawal, and this withdrawal presents itself sufficiently only in the face of man, but a hint also requires a *giving*, and that is why in addition [to] man's face-to-face it needs the *thing*». From M. Lewis, *Heidegger and the Place of Ethics*, Continuum, London 2005, p. 138.

he have access to the uniqueness of the being which is suffocated by the self-eternalized totality»³⁴⁵.

Section 2 – *Multitudo*

In Chapter VII we referred to Heidegger and his stepping into the political arena by attempting to reform the university. This issue might have been discussed entirely within Part II of this work, entitled *Gnosiology*, as its concern is the significance of knowledge and the way we should approach it. Nevertheless, we saw that any radical approach to knowledge, even on allegedly firm ontological foundations, is in need of an *ethics* because it embraces and subjugates the knower as much as the known, otherwise *gnosiology* would be restricted to *epistemology* and the whole scope of this work would decay immediately. If we do not know how we stand in the *open region* where *things* are known to us, then all we can say about *things* are their sizes, their colour, their shape or their weight but they will never be known to us as *things*. In Chapter VII we read Heidegger's intention not as a nationalistic drive but as the endorsing of a destiny that befalls us on the account of the whole Western world and, transitively, of the rest of humanity that the Western world has so profoundly penetrated, often violently. Years after failing to achieve that historically, Heidegger declared the *end of philosophy as metaphysics*, claiming that we are still not *thinking*, being passively dragged on the track of the highest achievement of metaphysics, *modern science* and its *essence, technology*. Nevertheless, we saw in the last section that this is nothing but a particular historical delivery of Being, which answers to the name of *metaphysics* and only the practice of *thinking* can reveal it as such. Technology is a *power of division*, analysis and control; it is the ultimate *extensive* and coercive affect of our world in absence of a perspective of unity. Nevertheless, two philosophers, who lived at the dawn of the modern scientific revolution, before

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

and after its official birth, were *thinking* on a completely different track, demanding in their own unique ways not to sever *man* from *nature*, a risk that they immediately saw and diagnosed. Heidegger never acknowledged that, but we walked down a few paths to show that neither Bruno nor Spinoza fit into what Heidegger defines as metaphysics, least of all as modern metaphysics or the history of *subject*. Nevertheless, one step is missing, that which would describe how the *being-with-one-another* of *man* that is finally reconciled with *nature* could possibly act on the *political* stage and give us some reasons for Heidegger's failure in this instance. Nonetheless, it is not our intention or within the scope of this work to cover these philosophers' political theories; whenever possible we shall remain on the level of the *essence of politics* in accordance with the path indicated by Heraclitus, who invited us to *take care of the gods*. We saw, nevertheless, that *taking care of the gods* amounts to relating to a totality through our being involved in the *fourfold*, «for this reason Heidegger's statement "only a god can save us" is indeed a political one and not nearly so risible as has been imagined»³⁴⁶. Spinoza's *intellectual love of God* has given us a few elements but we shall not be content. Such an ultimate understanding is not the province of an individual's intellectual meditation, which would amount to the return of a contemplative thinking; it is a complete involvement with life and, as such, it cannot be carried out by a mere singularity. In Chapter I we mentioned the myth of Admetus and his attitude towards language: Apollo says to him that, as a *man*, he has to bear two thoughts at once as one single thought is only allowed to divinity. Admetus comes up with a stratagem and invents dialogue, a discourse where two equals exchange and contrast different thoughts and opinions. Nonetheless, the stratagem eludes Apollo's instructions, as dialogue merely duplicates the thinker, thus not overcoming the problem of singularity. We observed that the university of specialization based on Schleiermacher's model, which Heidegger fought against in vain, is a kind of university that is based on Admetus' stratagem. In the course of our work we made an effort to find this dual thought by trying to think *intensively* and

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

extensively at once and, in the previous section, we tried to understand what *particular things* are in *essence*. We have discovered that *essence* is always productive, thus never equal to itself or to anything else: in *essence* there cannot be equals because *equals* are mere extensive abstractions. Therefore, it is the collective experience we should look at, not as a sum of individuals but from the point of view of totality. We believe that Spinoza's notion of *multitude* is able to provide us with food for thought in this sense.

Spinoza's notion of *multitudo* is hard to capture in a positive light at first, given Spinoza's contempt for common people [*vulgus*], for instance, in the *Appendix* to Part I of the *Ethics*:

We see therefore that all notions whereby the common people are wont to explain Nature are merely modes of imagining, and denote not the nature of anything but only the constitution of the imagination. And because these notions have names as if they were the names of entities existing independently of the imagination I call them "entities of the imagination" [*entia imaginationis*] rather than "entities of reason" [*entia rationis*]. So all arguments drawn against me from such notions can be easily refuted.³⁴⁷

Common people are for Spinoza the cradle of *imagination* intended as superstition, confusion. We should not draw hasty conclusions from this passage, as what Spinoza depicts is a situation where the "many" are left in a state of ignorance, so much so that they are literally dominated by the *knowledge of the first kind*, i.e. imagination, which means that they are in a state of weakness. *Imagination*, though, is the raw material for production and, by a different understanding, can produce a *multitudo* out of a mob. As Saccaro Battisti rightly points out: «in the Spinozistic discourse the psychology of mass and individual psychology nourish each other, moved by that powerful spring of inadequate knowledge and human affects, which is imagination. We already know that imagination is a psycho-physiological part of human life and, within it, potentially of the explication of totality (and in this resides its being positive). Nonetheless it is also the condition of the constitution and growth of the

³⁴⁷ B. Spinoza, "Ethics", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 243.

“passion” [*pati: ed.*] of the mind as consciousness of affects and fluctuations. All individual and collective conflicts and anxieties, then, get discharged on the political level. Such conflicts and anxieties are rendered even more complex and powerful by associated life instead of being equilibrated and reconciled»³⁴⁸. *Passions* are at the centre of Spinoza’s contribution to *politics* not because they are assumed to be a *political* issue but in virtue of the ontological condition of *men*, who exist as affected modes of *substance*. Any moralizing value judgement on passions as such originates from an arbitrary pre-conception of what is good and what is bad or from the conformity to common laws in a particular state. We should not forget that the *conatus* is the *essence* of *modes* as affirmation and preservation of their existence as *power* [*potentia*] and we saw that *essences* cannot give rise to conflicts, as they are pure affirmation. What we call conflicts from the *extensive* point of view are only caused by the necessary affirmation of *nature’s power*, which is indifferent to the destiny of single *modes*, for from an *intensive* point of view they are not numerically distinguished; they are – as we stated earlier somewhat imaginatively – reciprocally overlapping powers. Therefore, Spinoza does not expect each single *extensive* mode to undertake the path of rationality or of reducing men to *reason* just because it is in the interest of the state and our communal living. Spinoza makes this very clear right at the beginning of the *Political Treatise*:

[7] Finally, since all men everywhere, whether barbarian or civilized, enter into relationships with one another and set up some kind of civil order, one should not look

³⁴⁸ G. Saccaro Battisti, “Spinoza, l’utopia e le masse. un’analisi dei concetti di “plebs”, “multitudo”, “populus” e “vulgus””, in *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia*, Year 39, n. 1 (1984), p. 467. My translation from Italian: «[...] nel discorso spinoziano psicologia della massa e psicologia individuale si confrontano e si alimentano l’una con l’altra, mosse da quella molla potente della conoscenza inadeguata e degli affetti umani, che è l’immaginazione. Già sappiamo che l’immaginazione è parte psico-fisiologica della natura umana e dell’esplicarsi in essa delle potenzialità della totalità del reale (ed in questo sta la sua positività), ma è anche la ragione del costituirsi e crescere del “patire” della mente nella coscienza degli affetti e delle fluttuazioni. Sul piano politico perciò vengono a scaricarsi i conflitti e le angosce individuali e collettive che la vita associata, invece di equilibrare e ricomporre, contribuisce a rendere più complessi e potenti».

for the causes and natural foundations of the state in the teachings of reason, but deduce them from the nature and condition of men in general.³⁴⁹

This passage reveals something that up to now has been implicit throughout our encounter with Spinoza: that *reason* does not describe *Being* nor does it regulate its activity. *Reason* is characteristic of *knowledge of the second kind*, which is an understanding that is functional to *men* not being overwhelmed by the confusion of *imagination*. It is from such confusion, nevertheless, that bonds and relationships arise, including the most complex ones, such as the state. That is why Spinoza rejects any kind of contractualism as utopian and abstract. The intuition of *particular things* can only take place at the end of an *ethical* path, whereas *reason* only empowers us to the point of not being overcome by *imagination*, which is nevertheless recognized as the most fundamental condition of existence for *men*. Therefore, the passage from the Appendix of *Ethics*, Part I and the one we just quoted from the *Political Treatise* are not mutually exclusive. The former seems to condemn the *vulgus* in virtue of its being dominated by *imagination*, but only to the extent that the *vulgus* is understood as enslaved to its own superstitions. The latter passage, on the other hand, confirms *imagination* as a necessary and natural understanding of *nature* and, as such, it must be taken into account when considering the collective life of *men*. This is a crucial point that Spinoza addresses in further detail later on in the *Political Treatise*:

We therefore conclude that it is not in every man's power always to use reason and to be at the highest pitch of human freedom, but yet he always endeavours as far as in him lies to preserve his own being and (since every man has right to the extent that he has power), whether he be wise or ignorant, whatever he endeavours and does, he endeavours and does by the sovereign right of Nature. From this it follows that Nature's right and established order, under which all men are born and for the most part live, forbids only those things that no one desires and no one can do; it does not frown on strife, or hatred, or anger, or deceit, or anything at all urged by the appetite. This is not surprising, for Nature's bounds are set not by the laws of human reason whose aim is only man's true interest and preservation, but by infinite other laws which have regard to the external order of the whole of nature, of which man is but a tiny part.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ B. Spinoza, "Political Treatise", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 682.

³⁵⁰ B. Spinoza, "Political Treatise", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 685.

What is *sovereign* is the *power* of *nature* that is expressed through its affections and the bonds between them. This whole dispute between *reason* and *imagination*, then, suggests that any collective reality cannot be seen as a uniform bunch of equal individuals, nor can anyone wish to correct the ones who do not conform to the laws of reason. If the *political* problem has to be addressed, it has to be addressed from the perspective of a self-determining reality that, in the case of *politics*, must be understood as a self-determining *multitude* and not as an enslaved and superstitious *vulgus*.

Heraclitus playing dice with a few adolescents was considered as a truly and *essentially* political activity, whereas taking care of public assemblies was regarded as a foolish activity if compared to the former. Kids or adolescents were a politically irrelevant part of the πόλις and they generally were always in the history of Western political institutions. There is a further intuition we can grasp from this anecdote: if it is not institutions that define what is *political*, we can only see that the image of a few kids playing evokes exactly the kind of bonds that are not rationally imposed but that spring from an expression of *nature*. It is true that from Spinoza's point of view even artificial institutions are *natural*, as they are effects of the infinite causal chains that make up our reality. Reality cannot be coerced in any circumstance; it is our understanding of it that characterises our dwelling: the understanding of the most spontaneous and creative kind of bonds, such as boys playing, as *essentially political*, brings what is institutionally political onto the same level as what is naturally political because it represents the fundamental collective bonds. Yet, *intensively* those bonds that do not advance any institutional claim increase their *power* if compared to those that would like to control and regulate them: in this sense a project like the one found in Plato's *Republic*, that of bridling *desire*. In the same way the *vulgus* and the *multitude* are characterised by a different understanding of what, *extensively*, we would define as a mob. In this respect, with reference to an earlier work of Spinoza, the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Yovel rightly points out that Spinoza «does not envisage a radical, one-time revolution but a gradual growth of rationality from

within the domain of *imaginatio*, and he thinks it is the philosopher's task to provide tools for dealing with the various forms of this transition – as he himself does in his theory of allegory, metaphor and non-scientific discourse generally. While part of the multitude, whose dogmatic discourse has been shattered, will eventually move onto genuine rationality, the majority will remain in the realm of the passions and imagination, which, in Spinoza's plan, must be reorganized as an external imitation of reason»³⁵¹. Yovel is right in affirming that Spinoza does not expect a whole mass to be educated to rationality but a few rational ones to arrange collective life in a way that would direct imagination to a semi-rational disposition. Nevertheless, his perspective is highly partial and incomplete because it does not address the problem in *essence*. If on a level of political organization Yovel may have a point and that could be a realistic arrangement, ontologically there is a purely numerical understanding of the *multitude* and a partition within it that prevents any further understanding of what collective reality is essentially about. Within a purely numerical framework it is even hard to conceive how any kind of *intuitive knowledge* could take place: «Spinoza regards the multitude as a category in itself. Individuals can rise above the level of *imaginatio* and attain the life of *ratio* (reason), even the supreme degree of *scientia intuitiva* (intuitive knowledge) but the great majority is incapable of this – and the multitude is defined by that majority»³⁵². Spinoza's views on the majority and the consequent praise of democracy are represented already in the *Theological-Political Treatise* as a dynamic and not as a numerical reality:

For we have shown that in a democracy (which comes closest to the natural state) all the citizens undertake to act, but not to reason and to judge, by decision made in common. That is to say, since all men cannot think alike, they agree that a proposal supported by the majority of votes shall have the force of a decree, meanwhile retaining the authority to repel the same if they see a better alternative. Thus the less freedom of judgement is conceded to men, the further their distance from the most natural state, and consequently the more oppressive the regime.³⁵³

³⁵¹ Y. Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics. The Marrano of Reason* [1989], Princeton University Press, Princeton 1992, p. 145.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 129.

³⁵³ B. Spinoza, "Theological-Political Treatise", in B. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, pp. 570-571.

It is not our intention to go through the details of political theory but it is important to underline that Spinoza considers democracy the system that is somehow closer to the natural state. This does not happen in virtue of a few rational men who drive the irrational majority towards a good decision but in virtue of a decision that is *commonly* felt to be the right one and that can be replaced by a new and better one. Through a *common notion*, by exercising *reason*, the *multitude* makes its choices, as expressed by its majority, thus acquiring *adequate ideas* that increase the *power* of a certain collective reality. But that is the kind of *adequacy* that is functional to the interest of the *multitude* in that particular moment. Nevertheless, it is not the rationality of such choices that makes the *multitude*, organized in a democratic state, close to *nature*: as was said, *nature* is not organized according to human reason. The *nearness* to *nature* is confirmed by the fact that the *adequate ideas* provided by *reason* express the freedom of a *multitude* that is mostly irrational and driven by desires and wishes expressed on the account of *imagination*. It is not a few rational individuals who empower a *multitude*; it is the *multitude* itself, as a collective entity, which produces its own *adequacy* and its *dwelling*, as Ansaldi also affirms by underlining how Spinoza inverts the perspective of his time: «for Spinoza *it is “politics” that founds “ethics” and not the other way around*. Or, even better: it is “political ontology” that determines the field of construction of ethical concepts to be applied to politics»³⁵⁴.

Multitude expresses its *power* collectively; it is nothing like a sum of equal individuals or *subjects*. It is not numerical and it has to be understood *intensively*; therefore we cannot stop at how the *multitude* deliberates. In these respects we share Negri’s view: «In the recognition of the development of this human power, the fundamental passage of Spinoza’s thinking happens [...]. This human power is shown

³⁵⁴ S. Ansaldi, *Spinoza et le Baroque. Infini, désir, multitude*, éditions Kimé, Paris 2001, p. 361. My translation from French: «[...] pour Spinoza, *c’est le ‘politique’ qui fonde l’‘étique’ et non l’inverse*. Ou mieux encore : *c’est l’‘ontologie politique’ qui détermine le champ de construction des concepts étiques applicables à la politique*».

in the first chapters of the *Political Treatise* as the basis of collective existence, of its movement, *i.e.* of its sociality, and of civilization. The absolute has, then, power as its own essence, and it becomes existence thanks to the actualization of power. This is the definition of the absolute, from a metaphysical point of view»³⁵⁵. This *point of view* is not the mere construction of a rationally deduced *system of identity*, such as the one found in the *Ethics*; it is the practical change of understanding within the existential sphere as the end of any *mediation*: the expression of *power* does not happen through dialectics or through a *subject/object* juxtaposition. We saw how the *individual*, through the understanding of *particular things* in their *essence*, is bound to see not only *particular things* but also himself *sub specie aeternitatis*: no *subject/object* relationship takes place but that of an *intensive* identity. Similarly, the collective reality of the *multitude* is expressed not by rationally deliberating what is best for all – which can change at any time – but through an understanding of itself that produces a new reality: what is rational is not the deliberation itself, for that would imply that it has been reached through a collective rational discourse, which is impossible; what is rational is the *adequate* understanding of what is best as a *common notion* supported by a majority; what is finally *intuitive*, on the other hand, is that this kind of understanding has allowed for the expression of what is “best” as the practical enacting of collective emotions and needs. In modern Western democracies this is distorted by a transcendent system that involves representatives on one side and the media on the other: the *multitude*, in this respect, is in servitude as it does not understand itself *intensively* but through mediations that instruct it as to what to believe to be the best. This is achieved by addressing the multitude as “individuals”: each individual is instructed as to what he or she thinks and invited to express it; each individual is abstracted as a single entity sharing the same amount of *power* with

³⁵⁵ A. Negri, “Spinoza Sovversivo”, in A. Negri, *Spinoza*, p. 319. My translation from Italian: «Nel riconoscimento dello sviluppo di questa potenza umana, si verifica il passaggio fondamentale del pensiero spinoziano [...]. Questa umana potenza viene poi mostrata nei primi capitoli del *TP* come base dell’esistenza collettiva, del suo movimento, della socialità cioè e della civiltà. L’assoluto ha dunque la potenza come propria essenza, ed esso diviene esistenza in funzione e misura del realizzarsi della potenza. Questa è la definizione di assoluto dal punto di vista metafisico».

everybody else, with the difference that neither he or she nor anyone else exerts any *power* and gathers around centres of intensity such as political parties, television or opinion leaders. That means that, *intensively*, the individual counts for nothing and has no *power* in a society based on free individuals. A *multitude* cannot be a gathering of equal individuals. Either it understands itself collectively or it is enslaved, since it has no freedom: «The term power and the term freedom overlap and the extension of the first equals the intensity of the second. [...] These considerations are very useful as long as we consider the term absoluteness in the specificity of the Spinozistic political thought. In this perspective, as a matter of fact, the *absolutum imperium* will become a term that, meaning the unity of power, will have to adopt it as a projection of the *potentiae* of the subjects and define its totality as life, as always open, dynamic articulation of an organic being together»³⁵⁶. We contest Negri's use of the term "subjects", which would ontologically and practically obstruct such a perspective, but we praise his depiction of a vicissitudinal production of a collective reality that affirms itself through an understanding that turns into *power*. This happens in virtue of the fact that, within the *multitude*, I am not juxtaposed to the "other rational subject" in a situation of equality that is not only impossible but that finds its only solution in the sterilization of each other's *power* because the only way to be "equal" is to abstract oneself. In the *multitude* the expression of *power* happens as mutual affectivity, as everyone being the "iceberg of everyone else's tip", as the overlapping of *power*, which makes the emergence of individuality *indifferent*: my individuality is nothing but being affected by others in a series of contingent relations. It is not surprising, then, to see Heidegger make a very similar point already in *Being and Time*, one that we quoted at the beginning of

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 319-320. My translation from Italian: «Il termine potenza e il termine libertà si sovrappongono, e l'estensione del primo equivale all'intensità dell'altro. [...] Queste considerazioni risultano molto utili non appena consideriamo il termine assolutezza nella specificità del pensiero politico spinoziano. In questa prospettiva infatti l'*absolutum imperium* diverrà un termine che, nel significare l'unità del potere, dovrà assumerlo come proiezione delle *potentiae* dei soggetti e definire la sua totalità come vita, come sempre aperta, interna, dinamica articolazione di un insieme organico».

Chapter VII but that is worth repeating: «by Others we do not mean everyone else but me – those over against whom the ‘I’ stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself – those among whom one is too»³⁵⁷.

Distinguishing multiplicity within unity, then, has been a main centre of gravity around which not only our discourse on knowledge but also our ontological and ethical effort has orbited. This is the effort that Admetus was not ready to undertake when he invented dialogue; it is an emergency exit to the archaic truth of Apollo: *man has to bear two thoughts at once*. *Distinguishing multiplicity within unity* means rejecting the abstraction of *man* as rational *subject* in its dichotomy with *objects*. A *multitude* that understands itself *intensively* amounts to *man* breaking his isolation from *nature*. Heidegger did not see, within Renaissance thought, those philosophical drives that were attempting to avoid the abyss where *man* becomes abstracted from *nature* and where *things* become *objects*. He intuited that the problem was one of *knowledge* and in this he was correct; that is what led him to wish to reform the German university. The fragmentation of knowledge in universities, which continues stronger than ever in our day, and the increasing specialization have been the didactic tools for the abstraction of *man* and the dominion of *technology*. As such, *technology* is an overwhelming *power* that isolates *objects* as well as *subjects*. In this respect, Michael Lewis rightly points out that «Nothing exceeds *téchne*. The current age is defined by technology (*Technik*) in the sense that every being is technicizable or makeable. Heidegger would come to recognize the essence of technology (among all other phenomena of contemporary life) as precisely “being” in the form of its most extreme recession from the call to cover over this withdrawal ever more completely with beings»³⁵⁸ and later on he adds «If man has complete power to dispose over beings as he sees fit, then what he does not possess is power over being. He cannot choose to be called to his mastery. He cannot choose how the whole is to appear. He

³⁵⁷ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 154.

³⁵⁸ M. Lewis, *Heidegger and the Place of Ethics*, Continuum, London 2005, pp. 150-151.

is merely situated within it at a certain historical time and geographical place at which technology has allowed this mastery»³⁵⁹. Yet power over *beings* – which become *objects* in this sense – is not granted to *man*; it is granted to a *subject*, which is an abstraction of *man* understood as part of *nature*. What Spinoza has shown is that *power* lies in understanding particular things and oneself *sub specie aeternitatis*, therefore the *power* of technology, which is entirely based on an extensive understanding of beings, is translated into bondage and slavery for *man* understood as part of *nature*, following the annihilation of his power. The collective *power* of the *multitude*, which does not correspond to the “power of the many”, is not *political* in its expression of governmental institutions. What is *essentially political* in the *intensive* understanding of the *multitude* is that *man* understands himself through others, as a necessary expression of humanity, as opposed to the solitary and arbitrary abstraction of the *subject*. On the basis of such considerations, we could attempt to sum up Heidegger’s political failure in two main points. Firstly, although Heidegger had intuited that the political problem rotated around the problem of knowledge, in its essence, he identified the university as the place of knowledge: the search for a place that felt homely, deceived him and drove him to create a new sort of isolation. Secondly, his recovering of the ancient German notion of *Gefolgshaft* – a following of those who have the privilege to gather around a leader – although it recuperated some originary form of collectivism, fell into a Ptolemaic origin of orbiting around a centre. It did not take him long to understand the dangers and the rhetorical nature of such inspiration. His consequent retreat to the Black Forest and his poetical praise of the sylvan life and of peasant silence and immediacy amounted to become a refugee inside what he was trying to protect.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Concluding remarks

Nature Alive

At the beginning of our enquiry we affirmed that *memory* is *thinking*. Where does *memory* dwell? «Memory, in the sense of human thinking that recalls, dwells where everything that gives food for thought is kept in safety»³⁶⁰. *Memory* dwells in *nature*, the only place where giving and keeping in safety coincide. If *nature* is only considered *extensively*, then it suffers memory loss: *extension* is the giving of the *datum*, the consumption of a fact; it does not keep, it consumes and abstracts. Whenever *nature* is also understood *intensively*, then, by giving, it always keeps the *essence* of its *gift* concealed; this is the thought-provoking and creative moment, when the gift of *nature* is not exhausted in its consumption, is not an *object* or a fact. It might appear as a bold statement but in these few lines above we have summed up the whole *thinking* experience of the present work. We have adopted, in some respects, a very traditional method: we have endorsed Heidegger's task of thinking and looked for the answers in those places he had neglected. If this seems like a modest enterprise, I believe that, as philosophers, we no longer suffer the burden of having something to reveal. We have encountered a kind of lightness akin to Heraclitus' sitting beside the oven, we can afford to decline the responsibility of providing answers to the public. In addition, we should have no more reasons to doubt because we have come out of the *subjectivity* cage. The *ethics of thinking* has meant shifting thinking upon *nature*.

It is obvious that we do not understand *nature* as a mind undertaking intellectual activities. James Hillman, a great admirer of the Renaissance, inspired by Ficino³⁶¹,

³⁶⁰ M. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, p. 150.

³⁶¹ «To say "son of soul" is to speak in a Renaissance, Florentine mode, following Marsilio Ficino who was the first to place the soul in the centre of his vision, a vision which excludes nothing of the world's affairs because the psyche includes the world – all things offer soul. Each and every thing of our urban life has psychological import». From J. Hillman, "*Anima Mundi: The Return of the*

re-worked the notion of World Soul within his activity as a psychologist. In his psychological practice Hillman claims to have detected that he could «no longer distinguish clearly between neurosis of self and neurosis of world, psychopathology of self and psychopathology of world»³⁶² and that, furthermore, «to place neurosis and psychopathology solely in personal reality is a delusional repression of what is actually, realistically, being experienced»³⁶³. What he contests is the confinement of psychological activity in intra-subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, deriving from a severed and objective outer reality, as «for all its concern with the outer world, social psychiatry too works within the idea of the external world passed to us by Aquinas, Descartes, Locke and Kant»³⁶⁴. Hillman attributes the greatest illness of the world to the fact that it has been deprived of its soul, by which he does not mean some sort of supernatural flux running through inanimate things. What he is addressing is the fact that in most of his patients, neurosis does not appear to be a series of environmental factors that mechanically *cause* a neurosis within the patient's consciousness; it appears as affecting the world of the patient: the work pace, the noise, the threat of terrorism or illness, bad air are understood by Hillman not as a sickness of a single subjectivity but as a sick world. He founds his theory on what he calls “intelligence of the heart”, which is nothing more than *imagination* as we have encountered it so far. Inspired by Henri Corbin, who rediscovered some strands of Islamic philosophy, referring mainly to Ibn Al Arabi, he conceived of *images* as an interpenetration of consciousness and world, simply meaning that an image is nothing more than the world as it is expressed and understood through consciousness. Bruno's *shadows* of ideas and Spinoza's *affects of thought* are nothing more than this, in that they are the immediate expression of the world through humans, a truth that is revealed through its latency, *i.e.* concealment of Being, *substance* intensively understood or as *World*

Soul to the World”, in J. Hillman, *The Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the world* [1992], Spring Publications, Putnam CT 2007, p. 91.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Soul. Heidegger's monolithic understanding of the history of metaphysics makes him unable to appreciate the radicalism of Bruno and Spinoza's understanding of the world, which is nothing like an isolation of *man* into the shell of *subjectivity*. Furthermore, Heidegger fully inscribes *modern science* and *technology* into his understanding of metaphysics, thus giving the impression of an impossible conciliation between *nature* and *technology*, which only understands the former as *standing-reserve*. Again, Bruno's and Spinoza's understanding of Copernicus, on top of the interest and admiration for the scientific tools developed by their contemporaries, shows that *science* and *technology* can be understood differently. Even in Heidegger, though, a glimpse of the same admiration and appreciation can be found in his praise of scientists of the calibre of Heisenberg and Bohr, while attacking – and rightly so – the age of positivism: «That age also had its indolence, just as, conversely, the present leaders of atomic physics, Niels Bohr and Heisenberg³⁶⁵, think in a thoroughly philosophical way, and only therefore create new ways of posing questions and, above all, hold out in the questionable»³⁶⁶. Not surprisingly, it is again Hillman who suggests undertaking a similar view: «Technology is not necessarily the enemy of the heart; technology is not inherently soulless. We are less endangered by the brute facts of nuclear, genetic, computer, and chemical technology as such than we are by the brute anesthetized conception of these technical inventions as soulless mechanisms. Because they are conceived in the Cartesian-Christian fantasy, they become objective, brute and mute. Technical inventions have become the big repressed slaves, obedient to mechanical laws, disallowed breakdown, and so we fear them. We want the most from them at the least cost. Because the paradigm of our mindset allows soul only to subjective persons, technology is not considered part

³⁶⁵ Unfortunately it goes beyond the aim of the present work, but a study of Brunian atomism in relation to contemporary Physics would be mostly rewarding.

³⁶⁶ M. Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics", in M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p. 272.

of what Whitehead calls “nature alive”, a realm of speaking objects with faces, and is instead a fearful Frankenstein monster»³⁶⁷.

Hillman, on the threshold between philosophy and psychology, points the way to a new practice, that of laying the world on the shrink’s couch. What about the philosopher? Does the philosopher feel at home in his practice? “Nature alive” is the cry of the philosopher who demands to *dwell* and feel at home whereas the university is the realm of Admetus, where dialogue and critical thinking take place, where philosophy is encoded as one of many Humanities, no matter how far it may be from Humanism. Is the philosopher forced to pick between being enframed as a specialized academic and retreating to the Black Forest? Philosophers are granted intellectual activity and relegated to cultural debates whenever they step onto the public scene. In the second *Untimely Meditation* , Nietzsche laments: «being such an unloving and uncannily active concept – and word-factory, perhaps I still have the right to say of myself *cogito, ergo sum* but not *vivo, ergo cogito* . Empty “being” is granted me, but not full and green “life”: the feeling that tells me I exist warrants to me only that I am a thinking creature, not that I am a living one, not that I am an *animal* but at most a *cogital* . Only give me life, then I will create a culture for you out of it!»³⁶⁸. Dissociation of *thinking* from *life* is the condition denounced by Nietzsche, where *thinking* , in virtue of its being dissociated, is intended as *science* . According to Nietzsche *life* should dominate *science* . Production of culture from a conceptual and intellectual point of view is dissociation from life; production of culture from a living point of view is *life* , the thriving world of *imagination* , the world of the *multitude* , excluded from the production of culture in exchange for a college fee. A world that Bruno and Spinoza had widely experienced during the course of their vicissitudes and not in virtue of a vocation for martyrdom or exclusion, as Nietzsche instead seems to assume: «These outcasts of society, these long-pursued, wickedly persecuted ones – also the compulsory recluses, the Spinozas, the Giordano Brunos – always become in

³⁶⁷ J. Hillman, *The thought of the heart and the soul of the world* [1992], p. 123.

³⁶⁸ F. Nietzsche, “On the uses and disadvantages of history for life”, in F. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* , edited by D. Breazeale, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, pp.119-120.

the end, even under the most spiritual masquerade, perhaps without being themselves aware of it, sophisticated vengeance seekers and poison brewers [...]. The martyrdom of the philosopher, his “sacrifice for the sake of truth” forces into the light whatever of the agitator and actor lurks in him [...]»³⁶⁹. Showing contempt and without being himself aware of it, Nietzsche spotted what had been his two closest figures in the history of philosophy. But then we also committed an act of hybris and turned to the history of metaphysics in order to make sense of Heidegger’s challenge. But that was not the history of metaphysics Heidegger condemned, for Heidegger only considered the history of a success. Bruno and Spinoza do not incarnate a success, they incarnate the perspective of the infinite universe, which is much better. Bruno walks down his path all the way, beyond the heavens of the fixed stars:

[...]
*Henceforth I spread confident wings to space;
I fear no barrier of crystal or of glass;
I cleave the heavens and soar to the infinite.*
[...]³⁷⁰

And so does Spinoza:

*The Jew's hands, translucent in the dusk,
polish the lenses time and again.*
[...]
*Free of metaphor and myth, he grinds
a stubborn crystal: the infinite
map of the One who is all His stars.*³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, translated, with a commentary by W. Kaufmann, Vintage Books Edition – Random House, New York 1966, pp. 36-37.

³⁷⁰ G. Bruno, “De l’infinito, universo e mondi”, in G. Bruno, *Opere Italiane*, vol. II, p. 31. Translation from Italian provided by www.positiveatheism.org:

«Quindi l'ali sicure a l'aria porgo;
Ne temo intoppo di cristallo o vetro,
Ma fendo i cieli e a l'infinito m'ergo».

³⁷¹ J. L. Borges, "Spinoza," in *Borges, A Reader: A Selection from the Writings of Jorge Luis Borges*, edited by E. Rodriguez Monegal and A. Reid, New York: Dutton, 1981, p. 285.

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