

Emancipating the Many

Emancipating the Many:

*A Practice Led Investigation into Emergent Paradigms
of Immediate Political Action*

By

Wolfgang Fiel

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Comparison of other people's attempts to the undertaking of a sea voyage in which the ships are drawn off course by the magnetic North Pole. Discover *this* North Pole. What for others are deviations are, for me, the data which determine my course. – On the differentials of time (which, for others, disturb the main lines of the inquiry), I base my reckoning.¹
—Walter Benjamin

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2002 [1982]), 456.

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PREFACE

The immediate catalyst for having taken up this study was the violent outbreak of weeks of public unrest in the Paris banlieus in the wake of the shooting of a young man on the run from the police on October 27 2005. The obvious inability of local municipalities and police forces to explain, let alone to anticipate the swelling discontent with a system which is generally assumed to work effectively and to benefit all has led me to the assumption that we have entered a stage where the concept of representational democracy is seriously compromised.

The sheer scale or projected growth rates of urban agglomerations worldwide is certainly a strong, if not the only indicator for the radical change of the human condition in the wake of globalized economies, politics and communication networks. If once the lack of a “unitary theory” was attributed to the field of urbanism¹, from a contemporary point of view the range of issues and problems at stake far exceed the boundaries of any discipline in particular. Furthermore, to start the inquiry by reasserting the importance of the human condition will allow us to delve into the process of individuation, the diverse realities of individuals, their gathering in groups, their dialogue amongst each other and with their environment in its totality in order to account for the complex interrelations within a highly dynamic network of associations, since the emergence of a fully emancipated Many – as opposed to the One of the state – requires more than the flawed promise of representational democracy to act for the “common good,” or “general will”² of all.

Clearly this task is ambitious, for we have to bridge the gap between the needs, aspirations, emotions, anxieties and dreams of individuals on the one hand, and the temporal emergence of collective co-operation on the other. The so-called official knowledge, incorporated by endless columns of statistical data, gathered and administered meticulously thanks to the firm grip of institutionalised observation, is of little help though, for we have become increasingly conscious that the representations thereof are a poor match for the complexity of networked realities on the ground. My collaborative artistic practice under the name of *tat ort* is precisely aimed at looking into “matters of concern” as opposed to “matters of fact”³ in order to gain a genuine insight into the workings of existing settings, where we introduce ourselves as intermediaries for the initiation of a process of active participation by means of interventional apparatuses, conceived specifically for the context in question. Our respective experience has led me to the conclusion that instead of providing alternative representations based on the constructed self-identity of the body politic, the full-blown heterogeneity of the multitude thrives on the general intellect and the activity of the speaker. To speak is to act, and to act is the predominant trait of political praxis. It is through our acts and deeds that we disclose ourselves in public in the presence of others⁴. And it is through acting that we start anew and leave our mark in a situation the moment we intervene in the circulation of empty signifiers upon which we assign a name, the name of an event. It is through our interventional participation that we allow for novelty to emerge in time, as a process without representation but based on the fidelity for the designated event.

My research is centred around two questions: First of all, is it possible to devise an interventional apparatus (physical infrastructure) which would encourage meaningful participation, and secondly, is it possible to thereby initiating a process of dynamically mapping the amalgamation of existing information and the data obtained by participants based on face-to-face communication in order to draw up the portraits of existing communities beyond the scope of institutionalised representation?

Emancipating the many therefore is a statement about difference marked as intervention. This intervention requires the presence of others and the intention to act. It is the emergence of what I call “constitution of time.”

¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]), 11-12.

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy and The Social Contract*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) [1762])

³ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958])

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

P	Logical Proposition
X	Evental site
S	Situation
e_x	Event
x	Element of e_x
α, β	Sites or mathematical sets
\emptyset	Void
TM	Turning Machine
OS	Operating System
M	Model
S	String
MU	Mobile Unit
MU01	First prototype of the Mobile Unit
iD	initial Database
IE	lived Experience
T_n	Snapshot
n	Time increment
ISO	Numerical Standard Code
O	Numerical Control Mechanism, i.e. Milling Machine

For the sake of terminological consistence I follow Badiou's¹ useful convention that the units of ideological discourse will be called notions, the units of scientific discourse, concepts, and those of philosophical discourse, categories throughout my thesis.

¹ Zachary Luke Fraser and Tzuchien Tho, ed., *Alain Badiou: The Concept of Model, An Introduction to the Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics* (Melbourne: re:press., 2007)

INTRODUCTION

Three figures may serve the purpose of illustrating paradigmatically why the twenty-first century is likely to become what is referred to as the “Urban Age”¹: Globally, the number of people living in cities was 10 percent in 1900, 50 percent in 2007 and is predicted to be around 75 percent in 2050. Now that already more than half of the global population inhabits urban settlements, the diversity and sheer number of issues related to these developments seem overwhelming. Referring to the title of the latest book published by the London School of Economics and Deutsche Bank’s Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft², *The Endless City* will concern almost every aspect of human activity within a dense network of globally connected urban hubs. This is of far reaching consequences for the potentially infinite scope of a profession, which is believed to reliably monitor, analyse, comprehend, and organise urban form, its infrastructure, the flow of goods, capital, energy, and people on a daily basis and to possess the necessary foresight for predicting and shaping its future trajectories. However, if we only were to opt for one specific name of the profession to begin with, we find ourselves exposed to the dilemma of having lost a clear definition of what it actually is that we expect to be covered by it. Especially over the last five years, the proliferation of respective literature alone undoubtedly reflects a sharp increase of interest in the topic. What the textbooks have hitherto failed to deliver though is a commonly accepted, i.e., generally applicable terminology. Besides urban planning we are now familiar with terms such as city or town planning, urban design, urban development, urban strategies, urban studies, urban theory, or simply urbanism, all of which seem to encompass more or less the same range of topics, with one or the other specific emphasis on issues such as ecology, geography, infrastructure, sustainability, networks, governance, economy, or communication. It can be argued that we have maintained at least a differentiation between practice and research. But this distinction is hardly sustainable any more, since even the implementation of the modest intervention is increasingly dependent on a considerable amount of research which has to forego an actual planning process. Although far from conclusive, the above listings are intended to shed some light on what this thesis will not be able to deliver: a comprehensive picture of all aspects pertaining to what we might call the contemporary urban experience.

However, it’s about time to take a fresh look at the work of those who stand for a more differentiated take on the human condition in general, “lived experience”³, the epistemological and ontological implications of action, its eventual sites and the discipline of time, the importance of dialogue and concomitant re-emergence of public space, the full blown reality of networks of associations and the political consequences thereof, and – most importantly – the provision of a firm ground for practice as a form of research, fully prepared to tackle the ills of our time and to intervene in the consequences thereof in order to deliver what institutions cannot: A name for something new to be set in motion.

The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle. The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable.⁴

Statement of Intent and Contribution to New Knowledge

After having addressed my initial motivation, I will start the statement of intent with a more personal account of the intellectual path I’ve crafted for this thesis to unfold somewhat naturally in accordance to my major concerns, convictions and aspirations. It will be immediately clear to the most demanding of readers that although the task is to capitalise on the most pertinent of notions, concepts and categories⁵ from a personal point of view as well as to show convincingly that one masters the body of work produced on the topic thus far, this undertaking is far from being complete. However obvious a statement like this may appear at first, my emphasis rests on the experience that the choices made are the result of a long process rather than short lived gains of the cherry picker acting under the seasonal influence of a specific taste in fashion.

Notwithstanding its achievements, science has and still does strive to conform with the ill-conceived presumption that it can strictly separate matters of fact from the circumstances of its presumed emergence in the bright and clear light of an objective gaze, i.e., to separate the experiment from the observer. Of course, following in the wake of quantum physics, the emergent field of cybernetics has started to account for the disturbing influence of the observer as integral part of the experimental setting. This influence, however, has always been identified as being distinctly

¹ Ricky Burdett, ed., *Cities: People, Society, Architecture: 10th International Architecture Exhibition: Venice Biennale* (New York: Rizzoli, 2006)

² Ricky Burdett and Deyan Sudjic, ed., *The Endless City* (London: Phaidon Press, 2008)

³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*

⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178.

⁵ See footnote (1) in the List of Abbreviations.

negative in nature. Therefore my first statement of intent is the following: This thesis aims at fully integrating what has been neglected far too long, namely the intentional orientation of an actor to intervene in a given situation. The interventional character of an act is precisely what I will unpack in the second part of my thesis titled Praxis, which is dedicated to the work of *tat ort*, a collective co-founded and currently run by myself in collaboration with Alexandra Berlinger. I will show that an interventional act thus understood primarily rests on 5 pillars, all of which are covered successively in the investigations leading up to the practical part: lived experience, dialogue, the many, general intellect, and evental sites. To intervene in the context of contemporary urban settlements with highly fractured social fabrics and a multiplicity of individual lived experiences entails acting politically in the relational form of personal dialogues with the many rather than covertly observing the supposedly homogenised constituency of the people in order to thrive on the rich potentiality of general intellect within a constitution of time that plays out retroactively in the historico-epochal opening of evental sites. This means that my intention is to define political awareness beyond the category of the self-assured identity of nation states as well as below the institutional threshold of representation, which is increasingly based on and expressed by huge chunks of quantitative data. This, however, is by no means an attempt to replace the ideology of political representation with another concept of universal significance. Quite on the contrary, my intention is to show how the historicity of lived experiences can translate into the complex diversity of alternative narratives that have to be continually updated rather than forged into the narrow confines of a model that exhaust itself on the day of election. Time plays a crucial role in this process, since my undertaking is concerned with the novelty that arises out of processes. Since the emergence of events is always evanescent, the potential for novelty manifests itself precisely through an interventional act of retroactively assigning the empty signifiers of evental sites with a name, i.e., the constitutional act of enacting subsequent procedures of fidelity. That this process is by no means restricted to a limited number of interventional acts within a specific context but is conceivable within the operational framework of a specifically crafted interventional set-up will be exemplified in the third part of my thesis, where I will introduce the prototype of what I call the Mobile Unit.

My contribution to new knowledge is to show that with this setup the age-old contradiction between individual and collective modes of explanation can be bridged once the notion of unifying representation has been replaced with the concept of multiplied participation, and the belief in durable solutions has been replaced by a sustained faith in processes, which once enacted require continuous nurturing. In addition the Mobile Unit is conceived to provide for a friendly and stimulating environment to allow the staging of a potentially infinite number of renewed encounters in the sense of dialogues that stimulate participation. To participate is to contribute one's very own lived experience against the backdrop of the official point of view, which serves as initial set of data, there to be transformed continually in the course of meaningful interaction with the system. The outcome in the form of physical maps however, is no more than a snapshot at a given point in time, which – in order to be called knowledge proper – requires the interpretation of – and alterations through – a suitable number of successive outcomes. The retrieval of knowledge is based on notational difference and thus depends on the increasingly comprehensive understanding of the specific interconnections between the system state at a given point, its input, and subsequent feed back into the system. This process is the construction and continued nurturing of a peculiar alphabet (Dissipative Resources), or in other words, the building blocks for a novel language for the mapping of urban dynamics aimed at what I call the “emancipation of the many.”

Identification of field

To identify the field of research in a programme⁶ that explicitly outlines the need for cross-disciplinary inquiry is indeed an ambivalent undertaking. In my case – if we were to take urban design for example – this ambivalence is accompanied by an overwhelming amount of issues to be covered in this field alone, not to mention all those topics that exceed its professional boundaries. Furthermore – to stick with the example of urban design – there is not even a clear definition of the field as such, as I have outlined in the introduction. Given my educational background, architecture and regional design make for the most obvious candidates, whereas most of my practical work is more likely to fall into the category of visual arts. Another possibility of framing it would have been identifying a desired audience for the reception of the work. This view, however would only have deferred the problem to the level of dissemination, which hardly qualifies for a primary concern within the framework of a thesis.

There is yet another way to pose the question though. What is it that the existing theories, practices, and procedures in action fail to cover or fall short of being addressed in a comprehensive manner? All its shortcomings notwithstanding, in his book *The Production of Space* Henri Lefebvre came quite close to defining at least the necessary characteristics of a field that could make up for all the problems, gaps, misconceptions or lack of convergence that he accredited to the general state of affairs at a time when the field of urbanism was in its infancy.

⁶ It seems reasonable to familiarise the reader with the programmatic context within which this research is situated: “Within a transcultural, transdisciplinary perspective, the Planetary Collegium is concerned with the advancement of emergent forms of art and architecture, in the context of telematic, interactive and technoetic media, and their integration with science, technology, sociology, and consciousness research” (Source: Website of the University of Plymouth, accessed 11 July 2009, <http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/273>). See also:

Edward A. Shanken, “From Cybernetics to Telematics,” in *Roy Ascott: Telematic Embrace*, ed. Edward A. Shanken (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 73-74.

The theory we need, which fails to come together because the necessary critical moment does not occur, and which therefore falls back into the state of mere bits and pieces of knowledge, might well be called, by analogy, a 'unitary theory': the aim is to discover or construct a theoretical unity between 'fields' which are apprehended separately, just as molecular, electromagnetic and gravitational forces are in physics. The fields we are concerned with are, first, the physical – nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the mental, including logical and formal abstractions; and, thirdly, the social. In other words, we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias.⁷

Since Lefebvre talks about a theory, we seem to be thrown back to the same problem. But Lefebvre has got a point here, which, seen from a contemporary perspective, remains largely unresolved. What are the basic elements or seeds of the physical, mental, and social realm of the urban experience that have not yet been adequately voiced and framed within the bounds of a unitary theory? My answer to this question is surprisingly simple: The human condition. From here and in conformity with Hannah Arendt's assertion that the most basic of human capacities is to start anew, I can proceed with ease, since to act is what connects the politician with the performing artist and the mind of the intellectual with the shared reality around him. Traditional philosophy, fundamental for the ontological grounding of a specific discourse, however, does not fully suffice any such theory, for its attitude is contemplation. After all urbanism, however vague its contemporary definition – and probably more than ever before – is the field that fuels my inspiration more than any other, for it requires a dialogue across the disciplines and our urgent attention for the human condition in order to explore its many realities.

Methodological approach

In my statement of intent the emphasis I've placed on the role of the observer in experimental scientific settings is characterised by acknowledging the intentional orientation of an actor who intervenes in a given situation. Where science is expected to act upon matters of fact, one usually acknowledges the sort of disturbance or "noise", like Shannon and Weaver called it in their communication model⁸ in the realm of practice. With my methodological approach I attempt to challenge the clear-cut distinction between facts and experience. Two of my works as visual artist serve as paradigmatic examples for singular cases which constitute a rule without aspiring to establish some universal truth. Its paradigmatic character notwithstanding the example is inseparable from the fact that it is one case among others. Thus understood, my method is to sustain a delicate balance between a theoretical *a priori* and practical necessity, the total abandonment of the particular-general couple, in order to constitute an "analogical third through the disidentification and neutralisation of the first two, which now become indiscernible".⁹ The practice offers all the ingredients to permeate the specific in order to become exemplary without being reproducible. The paradigmatic use of artistic judgements isn't bound to an existing or yet to be established system of representation which subsequently would facilitate the explication of a set of rules as in orthodox scientific reasoning. Instead this methodological approach allows for the contingent (diachronic) oscillation between an either or in order to become a neither nor by abandoning a strictly synchronic conception of history in favour of shifting between a number of time layers, all of which are relevant simultaneously depending on the characteristics of the specific circumstances at hand, i.e. the specific setting of the artistic intervention. This is precisely the reason why later on, my investigation will lead me to elaborate on the work of Duns Scotus, Baruch Spinoza, Gilbert Simondon, and Paolo Virno, who have attempted to deduce a theory of individuation which for that matter is precisely based on refuting the law of the excluded middle. The call for abandoning the particular-general couple on philosophical grounds is further elaborated in the realm of political theory where I come to argue to firmly distinguish between a universal common and the communality of a pre-individual One. Agamben holds that to participate individually in an unparticipated commonality which exists prior to the process of individuation marks a "historico-epochal opening"¹⁰ (Agamben 1999, 106), whereby in contrast to the universal self-reflective identity of an autonomous subject, the pre-individual communality does not conform to numerical unity. What we are dealing with here is exactly the peculiar situation of a neither nor, the inapplicability of the law of the excluded middle. If we further assume that from a political point of view, the process of individuation precludes the possibility to define the body politic through the presumed identity of a homogenous constituency, the multi-layered historicity of lived experience forcefully illustrates the need for a thorough rethink of prevailing forms of political representation. This is exactly what I am trying to illustrate with the project in the third part of my thesis called Mobile Unit.

With the Mobile Unit I am setting the theoretical and infrastructural premises for new models to engage with local communities in the form of face-to-face conversations for the purpose of collecting, transforming, and mapping their individual inputs. The striking similarity between the categories of multiplicity and event to be found in Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*¹¹ and Badiou's *Being and Event*¹² respectively, vividly exemplifies the specific relationship

⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 11-12.

⁸ Claude Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1963)

⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method* (New York: Zone Books, 2009) 19.

¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 106.

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004 [1968])

¹² Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006)

of this project with my philosophical enquiry and artistic practice at the same time. For a differential relation to be actualised in diverse spatio-temporal settings, the signifying event of retro-actively assigning a name to the empty terms of a multiplicity is exactly what requires the intention to actively intervene in a given context outside the representational regime of an existing institutional *dispositif*.¹³ In this sense, the process of tagging or mining already existing sets of data (much like in semantic web applications) based on initial dialogues (as executed in my artistic practice) yield the spatio-temporal characteristics of an epistemological structure (outlined in *Difference and Repetition*), which has got the capability (computational paradigm) to be actualised instantaneously in the form of a three-dimensional map (notational proposition).

In addition to leading multiple dialogues the acquired information has yet to become knowledge proper. The intermediate outcomes of the mapping process provide for the raw material of sustained interpretation. With his emphasis on the individual-psychological and socio-historical hermeneutics of life, the work of Wilhelm Dilthey is of pivotal importance for highlighting the circular nature of comparatively interpreting what the lived experience of the many has brought about: The declared fidelity to retro-actively assigned events due to the human ability to act and start anew.

Setting the Scene: Main Characters

I will now attempt to briefly familiarise the reader with some of the issues evident either between the lines or against the personal background of specific authors. Inextricably linked with one another, these issues furnish my intellectual endeavour on the whole and provide for the material of and upon which I've crafted the theoretical framework of a practice that takes on the most variegated forms and temporal realities of shared experience.

In *A Grammar of the Multitude*,¹⁴ written in 2001 and published in an English translation in 2004, Italian philosopher and semiologist Paolo Virno reflects in a dense and elucidating manner on emergent features of what he calls post-Fordist condition. His inquiry is based upon the assumption that “we, the multitude” (a term he traces back to its putative father, Baruch Spinoza) constitute “publicly organised spaces” for the general intellect to thrive on “idle talk and curiosity”. For him the co-operation of individuated subjects is about to become the primary productive force, requiring the presence of others and thus displaying a marked linguistic-communicative quality.

The pre-eminence of language ties in with the ontological focus of the second book, a remarkable collection of essays in philosophy written by another Italian thinker, Giorgio Agamben, entitled *Potentialities*¹⁵ and first published in an English translation in 1999,¹⁶ where he sheds some light on the historicity of language, its pre-suppositions and potentialities in action.

As far as a general investigation into the *conditio humana* is concerned, Hannah Arendt appears to be a safe bet. But especially with her work, the obvious has to undergo a process of close scrutiny in order to qualify for more than what is generally accessible on the level of the text. What I am alluding to, is the pointedly political dimension of her work, which lives off the quick mind of an activist and her persistent belief in the most human of capacities, namely to start anew, despite and in the face of the unspeakable cruelties of the twentieth century. Hardly anyone else in the history of political theory¹⁷ is able to match the convergence of a solid philosophical foundation and the capacity to reflect, comment and judge upon the happenings of daily politics beyond the need to hark back to the secure grounds of ideology for the sake of individual opportunity.¹⁸

In 1923, Martin Buber published his seminal work *Ich und Du*¹⁹ (the English translation of which appeared in 1937 under the title *I and Thou*²⁰), with which he aspired to define the ontological foundation of being-here on the basis of a “world to be met”. Buber’s hermeneutic of the self based on a sustained dialogue with the environment in its entirety is a text of remarkable epistemological breadth, resonating in many ways – albeit not all of them immediately obvious – with Gilbert Simondon’s ontogenesis or Bruno Latour’s “sociology of the social”.²¹

Simondon’s case is in itself a telling example of a body of work, which continues to remain remarkably obscure despite the fact that his close friend Gilles Deleuze has never grown tired of promoting it. With Deleuze he shares an aptness for the concepts of scientific and technological discourse, without lapsing into solely metaphorical

¹³ Henceforth I use the French term *dispositif* as a reference to Michel Foucault’s definition of various institutional, administrative, and corporate settings or knowledge structures, which maintain or enhance their exercise of power within a particular social body. (Michel Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits: Schriften in vier Bänden* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), Bd. III, 392-395. Giorgio Agamben, *Was ist ein Dispositiv?* (Zürich und Berlin: diaphanes, 2008))

¹⁴ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar Of The Multitude* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004)

¹⁵ Agamben, *Potentialities*

¹⁶ It is important to know that his internationally acclaimed book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* appeared in the preceding year despite the fact that it has been written on the basis of some of the issues that appeared already in *Potentialities*.

¹⁷ It was Hannah Arendt herself who insisted on using the term political theory in favour of political philosophy or sociology.

¹⁸ Ideology does not include her fidelity to the American Revolution, the republican model of federal democracy, the rejection of totalitarianism, which for her was the natural precondition of freedom, and her engagement in the build-up of an independent Jewish army to be deployed along the Allied forces in World War II as an immediate response to a threat that has long gone beyond the bounds of humanity.

¹⁹ Martin Buber, *Ich und Du* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1995 [1923])

²⁰ Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004 [1937])

²¹ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social*

transfigurations thereof. It is thanks to his prevailing interest in the psychological and biological implications of a general theory of individuation that he was able to move with relative ease from the observation of natural processes to concrete scientific manifestations thereof.

Bruno Latour, on the other hand, rose to prominence in the wake of his book *Reassembling the Social*, challenging what he calls “sociology of the social”, namely the social sciences concept of the social being determined by structural necessity and the immobility of its actors. Consequently his actor-network-theory advocates the necessity of looking into the uncertainties of groups, actions, objects and matters-of-fact in order to gain the full-blown assemblage of highly mobile arrangements of networked associations, which are no longer rendered as inevitably linked by a general will.

It is precisely representational democracy’s presumption of the existence of a general will that the influential American journalist and philosopher Walter Lippmann grew increasingly critical of and has led him to summarise his views in the book titled *The Phantom Public*.²²

With respect to the question in what way the “disenchanted man” – as Lippmann had it - is able to participate in contemporary politics, German historian and sociologist Karl Schlögel, observes and describes a number of actual or potential civilian activities, which in his view deserves its full emancipation from the normative grip of institutionalised mediation. If one is to fully appreciate Schlögel’s methodological approach, it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of first-hand observation and experience in order to account for the intricate and at times peculiar entanglement of location and event as well as mood and temper of actors involved.

It is thanks to the work of Alain Badiou, which is pre-eminently concerned with the emergence of novelty inside a situation that we embrace the new as the result of process within a discipline of time, watching over the consequences of the introduction of a name for an event, to which its signifier declares her or his fidelity. The temporal nature of the interventional act of signification is what I consequently call the constitution of time.

The notion or concept of time is at the very heart of the work of yet another important figure in my research, Ilya Prigogine.²³ Without having to delve into his work at this point, the following quote from his autobiography marks the significance of time paradigmatically:

Among all those perspectives opened by thermodynamics, the one which was to keep my interest was the study of irreversible phenomena, which made so manifest the ‘arrow of time’. From the very start, I always attributed to these processes a constructive role, in opposition to the standard approach, which only saw in these phenomena degradation and loss of useful work.²⁴

The ripples of this veritable revelation are not yet fully absorbed by the epistemological framework of scientific research. What appears to become its prevailing *modus operandi* though is the reliance upon the concept of process.

Isabelle Stengers’ work has shown that it is the scientific adoption of the principle of evolution that throws into doubt the primacy of contemplation over action and has engendered the rebellious upsurge of philosophy of life against the categorical imperative of what ought to be.

With my thesis I intend to highlight this development and to define the contemporary task of practice led research as the bipolar movement between sustained observation and aimed intervention into the processes of daily life, both locally and on a global scale. On the basis of two projects conducted in collaboration with Alexandra Berlinger under the name of *tat ort*,²⁵ the second part of the thesis aims to illustrate exemplary how this movement is set into action and continues to unfold for years to come.

At this point, however, there is one fundamental question that remains to be addressed though: How is it possible to obtain a procedural *dispositif* for an adequate transfiguration of the narratives of daily life into a generally accessible form that is not a mere representation, but the temporal imprint of its own processual nature and subject to an act of interpretation within a hermeneutical circle?

This question lies at the heart of the third part of the thesis, reflected theoretically on the basis of the work of Oswald Wiener, and embodied physically by the envisioned reality of the Mobile Unit. Oswald Wiener is probably the least known of all my key references, primarily to be blamed on the fact that hardly any of his work has yet been translated into English. However, he was not only one of my supervisors but is somewhat of a role model in a specific way. Although any attempt to describe his personality or scope of work – in his case not only closely intertwined but close to a unity – is doomed to failure,²⁶ I’ll try to put him in perspective. Back in the late 1950s and early 1960s,

²² Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2002 [1927])

²³ It is important to mention, however, that two of Prigogine’s more commonly known publications, *Order out of Chaos* and *The End of Certainty*, were co-authored by Isabelle Stengers.

²⁴ Ilya Prigogine, “Autobiography.” Nobelprize.org, accessed August 18 2010, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/chemistry/laureates/1977/prigogine-bio.html#21

²⁵ At its inception, *tat ort* originally was the name of a group of young architects founded in 1998. It was joined by visual artist Alexandra Berlinger in 2002 in order to form its current structure as an open platform to work collaboratively and research driven in a wide range of fields, including visual arts, architecture, and urbanism. More detailed information will be provided in the second part of the thesis.

²⁶ “Modern renaissance man extraordinaire, musician and musicologist, founding member of the Wiener Gruppe, artist of rare originality, writer of the greatest distinction, social and cultural critic, mathematical epistemologist, theoretical and experimental neurobiologist, pilot, innkeeper, and most importantly, in the journey that is our life, Oswald leads his friends through the dark

Wiener was founding member of the Wiener Gruppe (The Vienna Group), a collective of young writers, artists, and activists, who – besides the Situationists²⁷ – emerged as one the most radical avant-garde movements of post war Europe and re-united in 1997 for the preparation of their honorary exhibition at the Venice Biennale (Weibel 1997).²⁸ After studying musicology, law, computer science and mathematics, Wiener soon developed a deepening obsession with the philosophy, psychology, and development of the mind, based on his preoccupation with linguistics and his active involvement²⁹ in the early stages of software development. What reached the breadth of a full-blown theory of cognition was published in 1998 as a collection of essays titled *Schriften zur Erkenntnistheorie* (Essays on Cognitive Science).³⁰ Wiener's didactic rigour, his persistence on terminological clarity, and his ability to trace the conceptual roots of his epistemology with the encyclopaedic capacity of a polymath caught my imagination long before taking up this research. His conceptual foundation owes to some extent to the thought psychology of the Würzburg School,³¹ which is based on the categories of problem solving, logical reasoning, and conceptualisation. Wiener combines this body of work with the developmental constructivism of Jean Piaget's³² "genetic epistemology"³³ in order to apply the concepts of scheme, assimilation, and accommodation to his own operational paradigm for the simulation of cognitive processes. Wiener's methodology is somewhat reminiscent of Simondon's, for what he does is to transform the yields of his observation of natural processes and introspection into the concrete paradigm of an existing technological application. The fact that Wiener applies the Turing machine to analyse the workings of the mind has caused frequent misunderstandings, culminating in the accusation that his methodology conflates one with the other. The sophistication and complexity of his epistemological theory was possible on the basis of the paradigm as a tool rather than being an expression of it, the clearest indication of which – as Wiener rightfully holds – might be the arrival at the concept of the Turing machine itself. This example, however, points beyond the concrete manifestation of Wiener's theory. It exemplifies the attempt to bridge the gap between the realm of ideas and its actualisation in reality, between the realm of a problem and its solutions. It exemplifies what Deleuze has termed vice-diction.

The Mobile Unit – as physical embodiment of the question formulated above – is a mobile toolkit envisaged to set in motion what I call "dissipative resources". These resources potentially comprises any kind of publicly available information at any given moment in time through and on top of which participants are encouraged to add what has gone unnoticed by the gaze of institutional monitoring. Without delving into further details at this point, the Mobile Unit seeks to address the foregoing question and – though currently in its prototypic infancy and dependent on funding – to go fully into operation any time soon. Here, I will set out the conceptual framework, the design of the physical infrastructure, the system architecture and its components, the computational paradigm and user interaction, the notational proposition for the actual mapping of momentary states of the system, and the hermeneutic framework for subsequent evaluation and feedback.

I would like to end this chapter with a remark on meaning – and will come back to it in part two – since it is the delicate tissue of language that somewhat loosely connects the theoretical mainstays of my argument without being addressed at any one point explicitly. I maintain a twofold attitude towards it: On one hand it is presented affirmatively as the primary capacity for political practice, but on the other being trapped in the web of semantic infelicities and ideological preoccupations once applied for invoking a supposed meaning. It is therefore the very boundary between the transmission of language in itself and the meaning of the terms transmitted, i.e., its predicative quality, that reminds us to be aware of our very openness for both aspects of communication.

wood so that the straight way is not lost." (Ira G. Wool, "Hommage à Oswald Wiener," 2:3 - *Oswald Wiener zum 65. Geburtstag, Supposé Köln, 2000, CD*)

²⁷ Roberto Ohrt, *Phantom Avantgarde: Eine Geschichte der Situationistischen Internationale und der modernen Kunst* (Hamburg: Edition Nautilus, 1997)

²⁸ Peter Weibel, ed., *The Vienna Group: The visual works and actions, A moment of modernity, 1954-1960* (Vienna and New York: Springer Verlag 1997)

²⁹ Between 1958 and 1966 Wiener held a senior position in data processing at Olivetti.

³⁰ Oswald Wiener, *Schriften zur Erkenntnistheorie* (Vienna and New York: Springer Verlag, 1996)

³¹ The Würzburg School was founded in 1896 by Oswald Külpe, a former assistant of Wilhelm Wundt and soon was accompanied by a number of hopeful young psychologists, among them most notably, Narziß Ach, Karl Bühler, Ernst Dürr, Karl Marbe, and Otto Selz. In outright contradiction to Wundt's work, they developed a new approach to psychological experimentation based on the self-observation of cognitive processes in the course of a given task (e.g. interpreting an aphorism or solving a problem). They claimed to have discovered a number of new elements of consciousness such as *Bewußtseinslagen* (conscious sets), *Bewußtheiten* (awarenesses), and *Gedanken* (thoughts). In the English literature, these are often collectively termed imageless thoughts, and the debate between Wundt and the Würzburgers as the imageless thought controversy.

³² The putative father of Radical Constructivism Ernst von Glasersfeld has declared on more than one occasion his fidelity to the work of Piaget.

³³ Jean Piaget, *Nachahmung, Spiel und Traum: Die Entwicklung der Symbolfunktion beim Kind* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1975)

Jean Piaget, *Meine Theorie der geistigen Entwicklung* (Weinheim: Beltz, 2003)

PART ONE:

INVESTIGATION¹

¹ With the term investigation I deliberately allude to the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, or to be more precise to his *Philosophical Investigations* (Philosophische Untersuchungen) with respect to the only terminus technicus to appear in paragraph 48, Part I (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001 [1953])), which is “language game” (Sprachspiel). It is with respect to this term that I hope my investigation will cast some light.

CHAPTER ONE

LIVED EXPERIENCE

In the beginning was Merz. This bold and forceful statement marks the beginning of the career of Kurt Schwitters,¹ who was one of the Dadaists² but introduced a somewhat different approach in defining what art is or should be as early as 1919, when he showed his first Merz-Bild in the Berlin gallery Der Sturm. One could certainly argue at length to what extent his art differed from that of the Dadaists (I will come back to this point later) but in more than one sense it was precisely what Dada was all about: To explore the richness, diversity, cruelty, ambiguity, and novelty of the urban metropolis in order to use the resources at hand for the creation of something new, to radically break with the past and to enounce an era in which art would not be relegated to a mere epiphenomenal side-effect of contemporary culture – as hitherto has been the case according to the view of their proponents – but to take a leading and defining role right at the heart of urban life. Despite their break with history, the Dadaists did not seek to create ex nihilo. The material was already there in order to be appropriated for the purpose of establishing a visual world order on the foundations of hitherto neglected potentialities, a never ending maelstrom of stuff, arranged and re-arranged through the techniques of montage, assemblage, bricolage, and tableaux vivant. The ingredients of their new world order lost their structural coherence. Certainly the terms retained their value as material but for the price of having lost their meaning within a web of newly created syntactical relations. The terms were relegated to the rank of empty placeholders, surrounded by floating predicates and suspended in the horror vacui caused by the traumatic experiences of the First World War, which – for the first time in the Modern Era – dramatically displayed the downsides of technological advancement. In that sense Dadaism displayed its propensity to take a more critical stance towards the technologically friendly role of bureaucratic apparatuses, an attitude which was in marked contrast to the early work of Duchamp, who affirmatively embraced the findings and advancements of modern science and technology as a hotbed of artistic inspiration and metaphorical transfiguration.³ What some have identified as the beginning of “a secret history of the twentieth century”,⁴ was to be continued with a more radical and distinctly political approach in coming to terms with the prevailing attitudes of a bourgeois society when the Situationist International movement took centre-stage of the artistic avant-garde in the 1960s. Of course, in many ways the Situationists might be seen as a natural continuation of Dada and Surrealism, but they nevertheless show some decisive differences with respect to their attitude towards the society as a whole and the leading political paradigms of the time. Their strategic mainstay still was to appropriate what the urban environment on the whole had to offer, this time round though not without lacking concrete alternatives for the society to overcome an oppressive political system and to rid themselves of the somewhat passive attitude towards the possibility of partaking and actively forming one’s own environment for the purpose of emancipating themselves from the political establishment. First of all, the city was now seen not only as the fundamental depository of resources to be appropriated but also as the test bed for the public staging of new ideas in the course of applying their methodology of psychogeography for the pro-active production of urban space. Secondly, what inevitably came to centre stage in the course of continuously exploring the urban arena was the human body and its immediate capacity of subjectively experiencing what hitherto was subdued by the influence of a prescriptive or at best contemplative attitude towards the use of public space, where everything else was confined to the privacy of bourgeois households.

It is not very surprising that Guy Debord’s teacher, the French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre, himself strongly linked to the Situationists, was the first to address this issue theoretically within the realm of urbanism or the production of space for that matter, when he talked about the revolt of the body.

Indeed the fleshly (spatio-temporal) body is already in revolt. This revolt, however, must not be understood as a harking-back to the origins, to some archaic or anthropological past: it is firmly anchored in the here and now, and the body in question is “ours” – our body, which is disdained, absorbed, and broken into pieces by images. Worse than disdained – ignored. This is not a political rebellion, a substitute for social revolution, nor is it a revolt of thought, a revolt of the individual, or a revolt for freedom: it is an elemental and worldwide revolt which does not seek a theoretical foundation, but rather seeks by theoretical means to rediscover – and recognize – its own foundations.⁵

¹ Dietmar Elger, *Der Merzbau von Kurt Schwitters* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1999)

² Leah Dickerman, *Dada* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2006)

³ Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998)

Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997 [1969])

⁴ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001 [1989])

⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 210.

However, Lefebvre's revolt of the body remains somewhat enigmatic, for he denies the necessity of a theoretical foundation for re-discovering the place of our bodies by means of his own theory. For him the most immediate source for an epistemology of life is based on lived experience. He continues:

Above all it asks theory to stop barring its way in this, to stop helping conceal the underpinnings that it is at pains to uncover. Its exploratory activity is not directed towards some kind of 'return to nature', nor is it conducted under the banner of an imagined 'spontaneity'. Its object is 'lived experience' – an experience that has been drained of all content by the mechanisms of diversion, reduction/extrapolation, figure of speech, analogy, tautology, and so on. There can be no question but that social space is the locus of prohibition, for it is shot through with both prohibitions and their counterparts, prescriptions. This fact, however, can most definitely not be made into the basis of an overall definition, for space is not only the space of 'no', it is also the space of the body, and hence the space of 'yes', of the affirmation of life. It is not simply a matter, therefore, of a theoretical critique, but also of a "turning of the world upon its head" (Marx), of an inversion of meaning, and of a subversion which 'breaks the tablet of the Law'.⁶

With what Lefebvre calls "affirmation of life" he introduced a notion into the discourse on contemporary urban life that hitherto has been neglected for the sake of abstract prescriptions or the normative regulation of space and its modes of production. Despite the fact that from my point of view Lefebvre's insistence on approving the affirmative spirit of lived experience⁷ to enter the domain of urban studies is one of the most important elements in the process of taping and unlocking what later will be defined as the general intellect, it is crucial to highlight the fundamental shortcomings of Lefebvre's argument regarding (a) the historical dimension, (b) the political dimension, and (c) the cognitive dimension.

First of all, Lefebvre failed to account for the fact that historically spoken, the rupture between the so-called external reality with its absolute measures for the truthful representation of the world and the discovery of the human body as the centre for individually experiencing this external reality has already happened a long time ago when Descartes' universal doubt, started to permanently change at least our scientific attitude towards the importance of accounting for the constrained reliability of measures taken relative to rather than independent of our body and its concomitant modes of creation (labour, work, action).⁸

The Cartesian solution of universal doubt or its salvation from the two interconnected nightmares – that everything is a dream and there is no reality and that not God but an evil spirit rules the world and mocks man – was similar in method and content to the turning away from truth to truthfulness and from reality to reliability. Descartes' conviction that "though our mind is not the measure of things or of truth, it must assuredly be the measure of things that we affirm or deny" echoes what scientists in general and without explicit articulation had discovered: that even if there is no truth, man can be truthful, and even if there is no reliable certainty, man can be reliable. If there was salvation, it had to lie in man himself, and if there was a solution to the questions raised by doubting, it had to come from doubting. If everything has become doubtful, then doubting at least is certain and real. Whatever may be the state of reality and of truth as they are given to the senses and to reason, 'nobody can doubt of this doubt and remain uncertain whether he doubts or does not doubt'... In other words, from the mere logical certainty that in doubting something I remain aware of a process of doubting in my consciousness, Descartes concluded that those processes which go on in the mind of man himself have a certainty of their own, that they can become the object of investigation in introspection.⁹

Secondly, when Lefebvre holds that the revolt of the body does not resemble a political rebellion, he was rather modest – to say the least, but when it comes to assessing the current state of affairs simply ill-conceived, for it is at least since Foucault in his history of governmentality has delineated the increasing importance of the pure and simple bios of the population that we understand the political importance of the body as such within the general framework of governmental practice itself. This is to say, that based on the genealogy of political economy and enforced by the technical means of apparatuses of state security the focus of governmental practice is specifically concerned with the provision of an adequate framework to maintain the pure biological potential of the population to enter the productive exchange between capitalist and worker.

Labor-power incarnates (literally) a fundamental category of philosophical thought: specifically, the potential, the dynamis. And 'potential,' as I have just said, signifies that which is not current, that which is not present. Well then, something which is not present (or real) becomes, with capitalism, an exceptionally important commodity. This potential, dynamis, non-presence, instead of remaining an abstract concept, takes on a pragmatic, empirical, socioeconomic dimension. The potential as such, when it still has not been applied, is at the core of the exchange between capitalist and worker. The object

⁶ Ibid., 210.

⁷ This clearly resonates with Bergson's *élan vital*, which was concerned with the body as the place of passage in an extended continuum of life: "But this special image which persists in the midst of the other, and which I call my body, constitutes at every moment, as we have said, a section of the universal becoming. It is then the place of passage of the movements received and thrown back, a hyphen, a connecting link between the things which act upon me the things upon which I act – the seat, in a word, of the sensori-motor phenomena" (Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1991 [1896]), 151-152). I shall come back to Bergson later in my argument.

⁸ I draw upon Hannah Arendt's basic distinction between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*, with the latter being further distinguished by labour, work, and action. (Arendt, *The Human Condition*)

⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 279-280.

of the sale is not a real entity (labor service actually executed) but something which, in and of itself, does not have an autonomous spatial-temporal existence (the generic ability to work).¹⁰

This is why, as Virno continues, “Life, pure and simple bios, acquires a specific importance in as much as it is the tabernacle of dynamis, of mere potential”.¹¹ My point here is not to say that for every aspect of life or lived experience as such a respective institutional provision of care is in place already, but that the task at hand is firstly, to identify precisely those areas where a specific discourse and coherent knowledge is lacking and secondly, to safeguard the formation of any such discourse and the concomitant accumulation of knowledge from the grip of governmental policies, in order to prevent it from being analysed and transformed into a set of concrete measures for executing and reasserting the prevailing state of affairs. This task, however, is self-evidently of intrinsically political nature, and thus requires the fundamental questioning of our current system of representational democracy.

Finally, there is yet another problem with Lefebvre’s notion of lived experience, since he is not only vague in describing what these experiences are, but moreover – or rather as a consequence of this – fails to endow the bearer of these experiences with a proper interface to voice, transform, and share them with others. In other words, Lefebvre lacks an operational dimension to his theory and therefore remains trapped in the circular movement of explaining the reason for the importance of individual experience for the production of space with the phenomenon of revolting bodies in order to refer this very phenomenon back to bodily sensations yet to be fully recovered from contemporary oblivion.

I believe that the operation of bridging the gap between the intimate sensations of lived experience and its public expression being subject to a process of collective deliberation has to be instilled on the basis of a two-fold movement: Firstly: Through participation. Secondly: Through encounter.

¹⁰ Virno, *A Grammar Of The Multitude*, 82.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

CHAPTER TWO

PARTICIPATION

The conceptual specification of participation has to be grasped on the fundamental level of being, either based on a supposition that precedes the existence of a self-reflective I or as an absolute being, to be attained on the basis of a fundamental principle, which is that of necessity.

At first, this basic way of framing participation does seem to offer little for the discourse on individuals actively participating in processes of political deliberation. If we turn to the latter approach though, which is the option formulated by Hegel, we soon will recognise its immediate consequences for the relationship between democracy and autonomy, for this relationship is located right at the heart of the very possibility for democracy to emerge on the basis of a constituency conceived as a whole, i.e. by way of constituting “the people”. For one of the most eminent political philosophers of our time, Ernesto Laclau, the most radical incarnation of autonomy is the result of self-determination.

An entity is autonomous as far as it does not have to go outside itself in order to be determined in its being. It is in these terms that self-determination, freedom and infinitude formed, for Hegel, an in-dissociable whole: true infinitude, as different from a spurious one, involves finding within itself, the principle of its own determination. And this is the very definition of freedom conceived as autonomy. But this triple equation – freedom, self-determination and autonomy – involves also the notion that the truly autonomous subject can only be a universal one. As a result, freedom and necessity become, for this universal subject, strictly synonymous... It is only as far as my true self is the universal that nothing is external to myself and that I am really autonomous; anything less than this universal self will be limited by something essentially alien which will be the source of an irreducible heteronomy.¹

Laclau continues that concerning democracy the question arises whether the continued universalisation of specific demands is what grants the various social identities the very possibility to constitute the identity of the people in contrast to the particularism of a plurality of demands. He further acknowledges that for democracy to be possible at all, the gap between the heteronomy of individual demands and the universal autonomy of the community has to be bridged.

Freedom would involve an un-decidable tension between autonomy and heteronomy and would thus become the name of that very un-decidability. The referent of that name, however, would have been displaced: it would no longer be the closure of the gap between universality and particularity, but the very impossibility of that closure. So, we will have to explore the different uses to which heteronomy can be put in relation to democracy.²

This relation between heteronomy and democracy is what concerns us here, since within the Hegelian premises of the ultimate self-identity of the subject of political discourse, the tension of everything that finds itself excluded from the necessity of self-determination and the closed community of “the people” has to be resolved on the basis of a process, which aims at conciliating what has been generated out of the same closure that enabled democracy in the first place. In other words, the subjects of Laclau’s heteronomy are obliged to confer their particularities to a somewhat enigmatic process of universal identification (Laclau calls this process building “contingent chains of equivalences”³) in order to assume a certain degree of autonomy and power. The price to pay for subjects-turned-emancipated-citizens is twofold: Firstly, they have to identify themselves with the “common good” of “a people” and secondly, the universalisation thereby achieved is possible only by means of representation. The fundamental problem with this conception of democracy is that the subject is trapped in a bipolar movement between particular needs, demands, etc. and the ultimate identification with a universal ideal, without anything in-between and deprived of any possibility to include the Other on either side of the equation without a process of identification. How should we conceive of identification once we’ve lost a clear idea of what it is we are called to identify with? Moreover, how are we supposed to go about the process of identification, once the realm of its significance stretches far beyond the boundaries of nation states? According to the prevailing model, an individual wanting to participate is forced to remain either particular or to become universal with anything that would allow for a dynamic conception of political deliberation being deferred to the antagonistic battlegrounds of class struggles or the representational apparatuses of state bureaucracy.

¹ Ernesto Laclau, “Democracy between Autonomy and Heteronomy,” in *Democracy Unrealized, Documental1 Platform1*, ed. Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Okwui Enwezor, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 377-378.

² Laclau, “Democracy between Autonomy and Heteronomy,” 377–378.

³ Ibid., 381.

In contrast to this version of democracy, I will now turn the attention the alternative option formulated above, which is a conception of being based on the supposition that precedes the existence of a self-reflective I.

All that is unparticipated constitutes the participated out of itself. All hypostases are linked by an upward tension to existences not participated. The unparticipated, having the logos of unity (being, that is, its own and not another's, and being separated from the participated) generates what can be participated. For either it must remain fixed in sterility and isolation, and so must lack a place of honour; or else it will give something of itself, such that the receiver becomes a participant and the given subsists by participation. Everything that is participated, becoming a property of that by which it is participated, is secondary to that which in all is equally present and has filled them all out of its own being. That which is in one is not in the others; that which is present to all alike, that it may illuminate all, is not in any one, but is prior to them. For either it is in all, or in one out of all, or prior to all. But a principle which was in all would be divided amongst all, and would itself require a further principle to unify the divided; and further, all the particulars would no longer participate in the same principle, but this in one and that in another, through the diremption of its unity. And if it be in one out of all, it will be a property no longer of all but of one. If, then, it is both common to all that can participate and identical for all, it must be prior to all: such is the Unparticipated.⁴

This quote paradigmatically exemplifies the major difference between the conception of a universal common and the communality of a pre-individual One as the unparticipated unity of which a specific being is a separated participant and thus secondary to what is equally present in all. Here to participate does not involve the universal closure of a potentiality at the end of a historical process of identification but is its exact opposite. To participate individually in an unparticipated commonality that exists prior to the process of individuation marks a "historico-epochal opening",⁵ a process without a definite end and without the existence of the excluded middle. Furthermore, the postulated common is external to the intellect, whereas the universal self-reflective identity of the I is a product of verbal thought and is inside the intellect. It is exactly this problem of ontogenesis which was the starting point for Gilbert Simondon, to develop a theory of individuation that has its roots in some of the neo-Platonic writings from the 5th century AD (such as Proclus), reappeared in Scholasticism, most prominently in the work of Duns Scotus, and have been taken up most recently by Italian philosopher Paolo Virno in the context of his seminal work *A Grammar of the Multitude*. I shall turn my attention to the role of individuation in Virno's theory later in my argument, but for now I would like to focus more profoundly on Simondon for two reasons: First of all, although trained as a philosopher, Simondon held a professorship in psychology at the Sorbonne for good reason. His prevailing interest in the psychological implications of a general theory of individuation, which he has based on biology and information theory, enabled him to conceive of a process seamlessly oscillating between internal and external aspects of individuation with respect to the environment or other individuals and their affective and emotive resonances to one another.

Secondly, very early on in his work, Simondon discovered the importance of scientific discourse and technological advancement for the development of his philosophy,⁶ a fact that pays off greatly especially with respect to his theory of individuation, where he moves with ease between technological metaphor and the axiomatic explication of an idea.

Simondon begins his discussion of the problem of ontogenesis with the question whether a principle exists that is anterior to the process of individuation, a principle that is as such endowed with the universal quiddity and can turn itself into multiple haecceities. Obviously this would amount to serve as a basis for a relation, which already pertains to the same mode of being as anything that derives from it. This is exactly the Hegelian double of foundation (*Grund*) and condition (*Bedingung*). Rejecting both, atomist substantialism and the bipolar schema of hylomorphism, Simondon denies the existence of a principle of individuation, for the individual does not mark the end of a process but should be grasped as relative entity, marking a specific stage in an ongoing process of individuation never to be fully exhausted with respect to the potentialities of pre-individual reality.

We would like to show that the search for the principle of individuation must be reversed, by considering as primordial the operation of individuation from which the individual comes to exist and of which its characteristics reflect the development, the regime and finally the modalities. The individual would then be grasped as a relative reality, a certain phase of being that supposes a preindividual reality, and that, even after individuation, does not exist on its own, because individuation does not exhaust with one stroke the potentials of preindividual reality. Moreover, that which the individuation makes appear is not only the individual, but also the pair individual-environment. The individual is thus relative in two senses, both because it is not all of the being, and because it is the result of a stage of the being in which it exited neither as individual, nor as principle of individuation.⁷

Simondon continues with a definition of pre-individual reality and the very modality of becoming in opposition to Being, both of which are attempts of marking the dynamics of a process rather than being graspable as a result that

⁴ Proclus in: Agamben, *Potentialities*, 111-112.

⁵ Ibid., 106.

⁶ Gilbert Simondon, "Technical Mentality," *Parrhesia* 7 (2009), accessed July 3 2010, http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia07/parrhesia07_simondon2.pdf.

⁷ Gilbert Simondon, "The Position of the Problem of Ontogenesis," *Parrhesia* 7 (2009), accessed July 3 2010, http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia07/parrhesia07_simondon1.pdf, 5.

appears at the edge of becoming. Each stage of becoming has to be seen as a dimension of being itself, momentary and unstable resolution, prone to further refinement in a continued and primordial process of individuation.

Pre-individual being is being in which there is no phase; the being in which individuation occurs is that in which a resolution appears through the division of being into phases. This division of being into phases is becoming. Becoming is not a framework in which being exists, it is a dimension of being, a mode of resolution of an initial incompatibility that is rich in potentials. Individuation corresponds to the appearance of phases in being that are the phase of being. It is not a consequence placed at the edge of becoming and isolated; it is this operation itself in the process of accomplishing itself.⁸

What is explained in a next step corresponds with what I've mentioned above with regards to the law of the excluded middle. Any phase of being in the ongoing process of individuation is not endowed with unity, is not the self-contained entity of an autonomous subject, but a metastable equilibrium sustaining ongoing operational exchanges between different system states of preliminary equilibria.

In a certain sense, it could be said that the only guiding principle is that of the conservation of being through becoming; this conservation exists through the exchanges between structure and operation, proceeding by quantum leaps through successive equilibria. In order to think individuation, being must be considered neither as a substance, nor matter, nor form, but as a system that is charged and supersaturated, above the level of unity, not consisting only of itself, and that cannot be adequately thought using the law of the excluded middle.⁹

At this point, Simondon touches upon a very pertinent concept in scientific discourse, namely research connected to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Classical thermodynamics deals with equilibrium structures, i.e., the entropy of a system is defined by its thermodynamic equilibrium. Let us leave aside divergent definitions of entropy, for example from the context of information theory, where it is predominantly translated as disorder; this should not be confused with its meaning within the realm of thermodynamics. I would like to draw my attention towards those developments in the field of chemical reactions that fall into the category of dissipative structures, a term coined by Ilya Prigogine and published in English for the first time in 1969.¹⁰ What Prigogine and his fellow researchers at the Université Libre de Bruxelles¹¹ discovered was that besides the classical equilibrium structures there exist dissipative coherent structures for sufficient, far-from-equilibrium conditions in the so-called non-linear branch of thermodynamics.

The interaction of a system with the outside world, its embedding in nonequilibrium conditions, may become in this way the starting point for the formation of new dynamic states of matter – dissipative structures.¹²

It was Prigogine himself who empathically emphasized the kinship of his findings with molecular biology, although dealing with complementary developments.

Indeed, from the point of view of physics, we now investigate 'complex' situations far removed from the ideal situations that can be described in terms of equilibrium thermodynamics. On the other hand, molecular biology succeeded in relating living structures to a relatively small number of basic biomolecules. Investigating the diversity of chemical mechanisms, it discovered the intricacy of the metabolic reaction chain, the subtle, complex logic of the control, inhibition, and activation of the catalytic function of the enzymes associated with the critical step of each of the metabolic chains. In this way molecular biology provides the microscopic basics for the instabilities that may occur in far-from-equilibrium conditions.¹³

It is worth mentioning that in the autobiography Prigogine provided on the occasion of his being presented with the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1977, he explicitly pays tribute to the pioneering work of the late Alan Turing: "Since 1952, [Turing]¹⁴ had made interesting comments about structure formation as related to chemical instabilities in the field of biological morphogenesis."¹⁵

⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹ Simondon, *The Position of the Problem of Ontogenesis*, 6

¹⁰ Ilya Prigogine, *Structure, Dissipation and Life* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publ. Company, 1969)

¹¹ Prigogine, *Autobiography*

¹² Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 143.

¹³ Prigogine and Stengers, *Order out of Chaos*, 154.

¹⁴ Alan Mathison Turing, *Morphogenesis: Collected Works of A.M. Turing* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science Publishers, 1992 [1952])

¹⁵ Prigogine, *Autobiography*

Abstract of the paper by Alan Turing Prigogine is referring to:

"It is suggested that a system of chemical substances, called morphogens, reacting together and diffusing through a tissue, is adequate to account for the main phenomena of morphogenesis. Such a system, although it may originally be quite homogeneous, may later develop a pattern or structure due to an instability of the homogeneous equilibrium, which is triggered off by random disturbances. Such reaction-diffusion systems are considered in some detail in the case of an isolated ring of cells, a mathematically convenient, though biologically unusual system. The investigation is chiefly concerned with the onset of instability. It is found that there are six essentially different forms which this may take. In the most interesting form stationary waves appear on the ring. The purpose of this paper is to discuss a possible mechanism by which the genes of a zygote may determine the anatomical structure of the resulting organism. The theory does not make any new hypotheses; it merely suggests that certain well-known physical laws are

I shall come back to dissipative structures and the catalytic function of attractor lines in part three of my thesis. At this point, however, it was important to introduce the concept in the context of molecular biology.

As indicated above, one of the intriguing features of Simondon's conceptual *dispositif* is that he maintains a threefold attitude with regards to the relationships that determine the nature of individuating individuals: Firstly, the relation between the individual and the pre-individual One is in a continuous state of flux, since the process of individuation never ceases to evolve. Secondly, the relation between the individual and its environment necessitates permanent modification of external but also internal structures according to the needs identified, and thirdly, the relation of individuals to themselves, which Simondon calls resonance. Internal resonance basically designates the self-reflective capacity of individuals with respect to information about their own system accumulated in the course of individuation, including subsequent adjustments to environmental impacts.

There is, in the living, an individuation by the individual and not only a functioning that would be the result of an individuation completed once and for all, as if it had been manufactured; the living resolves problems, not only by adapting itself, that is to say by modifying its relation to the environment (which a machine can do), but by modifying itself, by inventing new internal structures and by completely introducing itself into the axiomatic of a vital problem. The living individual is a system of individuation, an individuating system and a system individuating itself; internal resonance and the translation of the relation to itself into information are in this system of the living. In the physical domain, internal resonance characterizes the limit of the individual that is in the process of individuating itself, in the living domain, this resonance becomes the criterion for the individual in its entirety insofar as it is an individual; it exists in the system of the individual and not only in that which the individual forms with its environment.¹⁶

When Simondon turns his attention to the category of participation, he reveals his philosophical roots in Proclus, as quoted in Agamben above:

Participation, for the individual, is the fact of being an element in a greater individuation (the participated), via the intermediary of the charge of preindividual reality (the unparticipated) that the individual contains, that is, via the potentials (that which is participated) that the individual contains.¹⁷

The conception of participation is further explained by introducing the category of the transindividual, understood to be brought about and sustained by the interplay of at least two of the above mentioned relations of the living individual: Each individual of a group is connected with the others on the grounds of their respective relation to the pre-individual reality, whereas the psychic reality of each individual, established reciprocally to the process of collective individuation, signifies the interior relation in order to sustain the systematic unity of psychic individuation. The third relation, which is that between the individual and its environment, pertains to the mental domain and therefore does not contribute to immediate processes of social formation in a strict sense.

Individuation in the form of the collective turns the individual into a group individual, linked to the group by the preindividual reality that it carries inside itself and that, when united with the preindividual realities of other individuals, individuates itself into a collective unity. Both individuations, the psychic and the collective, are reciprocal to one another, they allow for the definition of a category of the transindividual, which can be used to explain the systematic unity of the interior (psychic) individuation and the exterior (collective individuation).¹⁸

But what can be said about the operational aspects of Simondon's theory? What precisely is it that links not only the different domains of individuation as such – physical, biological, mental, and social – but moreover the successive steps of structuring the saturated (metastable) state of the pre-individual One? The vital operation, which endows the process of organic individuation with a distinct direction is – according to Simondon – the procedure of transduction.

By transduction we mean an operation – physical, biological, mental, social – by which an activity propagates itself from one element to the next, within a given domain, and founds this propagation on a structuration of the domain that is realized from place to place: each area of the constituted structure serves as the principle and the model for the next area, as a primer for its constitution, to the extent that the modification expands progressively and at the same time as the structuring operation... Transduction is the correlative appearance of dimensions and structures in a being of preindividual tension, that is to say in a being that is more than unity and more than identity, and that has not yet dephased itself into multiple dimensions. The extreme terms reached by the transductive operation do not exit prior to this operation; its dynamism comes from the primitive tension of the system of the heterogeneous being that dephases and develops dimensions according to which it structures itself.¹⁹

sufficient to account for many of the facts" (Alan Mathison Turing, "The Chemical Basis of Morphogenesis." The Royal Society, accessed September 17 2010,

<http://rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/237/641/37.abstract>.)

¹⁶ Simondon, *The Position of the Problem of Ontogenesis*, 7.

¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹⁸ Simondon, *The Position of the Problem of Ontogenesis*, 8.

¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

Now we've unraveled both terms that appeared earlier on in my analysis on autonomy within the context of Simondon's ontogenesis: The first term was the universal nature of the subject of self-determination, operating on the basis of the law of the excluded middle²⁰ – which I've replaced with the pre-suppositional One of the process of individuation – and the second term was the homogenous community – which I replaced by the heterogeneous communality of being in the process of individuation. In addition the procedure of transduction offers precisely what Laclau's category of hegemony lacks, namely a lucid path to bridge the gap between the level of particular and seemingly unconnected subjectivity on the one hand, and the generalized needs of a homogenised *dēmos*, without resorting to the universality of self-assumed identity. It could be objected that what Simondon offers at best is an operational paradigm, elaborated from a rather technological point of view and hardly applicable to the social realm of political deliberation. Even if I grant this objection to meet a point, it does little harm to my quest of coming to terms with the basic processes within the general framework of an epistemological investigation. From a hermeneutical point of view, what Dilthey called the analytic and descriptive aspects of hermeneutics²¹ allows to reconcile the seemingly contradictory movements I considered earlier. The dynamic vitality of the process as such and its translation into suitable equivalents of formal capacity is itself a twofold operation of descriptive and analytic dimension, a model that is able to retain the basic kinetics of the procedure in order to provide for the necessary operational quality of general applications across the borders of specific disciplines. Before I will turn my attention to the second part of my argument regarding the conceptual specification of participation, which, after all is intended to focus on the social aspects of it, it is important though to consider yet another dimension of Simondon's theory. Since my claim to map a path for a formal analysis of the concept of participation should not be confused with a method to endow its terms with a distinct identity nor to grant them any form of stable representation, my task is to design a process rather than to search for a "Good Form"²². To add these remarks on the notion of representation at this point happens for sake of consistency with respect to Simondon's theory of individuation thought, and will be subject to further investigation later in my argument.

The notion of form must be replaced by that of information, which presupposes the existence of a system in a state of metastable equilibrium that can individuate itself; information, unlike form, is never a unique term, but the signification that springs from a disparation. The ancient notion of form, such as provided by the hylomorphic schema, is too independent of any notion of system and metastability. That which Gestalt theory provided contains, on the contrary, the notion of a system and is defined as the state towards which the system tends when it finds its equilibrium: it is the resolution of a tension. Unfortunately, an all too summary physical paradigmatism caused Gestalt theory to only consider the state of stable equilibrium as a system state of equilibrium capable of resolving tension: Gestalt theory was unaware of metastability. We would like to take up Gestalt theory and, through the introduction of a quantum condition, show that the problem posed by Gestalt theory cannot be directly resolved using the notion of stable equilibrium, but only by making use of the notion of metastable equilibrium. The 'Good Form' is no longer simple form, the pregnant geometric form, but the signifying form, that is, that which establishes a transductive order within a system of reality that contains potential. [...] good form is structure of compatibility and viability, it is the dimensionality that is invented and according to which there is compatibility without degradation.²³

Simondon clearly indicates how the procedure of transduction serves as methodological framework for investigating the potentiality of reality and to render visible the compatibility and viability of a system whose intrinsic form is sensible only as preliminary structuration of metastable dimensionality. In addition, Simondon focused his attention on the individuation of knowledge, an issue of chief importance in the third part of my thesis. To understand is to participate in an ongoing process. Knowledge, based on understanding ones environment (including other individuals, nature, and things) through the process of individuation, is the result of sustained participation through encounter.

The individuation of the reality that is exterior to the subject is grasped by the subject using the analogical individuation of knowledge within the subject; but it is through the individuation of knowledge, and not through knowledge alone, that the individuation of non-subject beings is grasped. Beings may be known by the subject's knowledge, but the individuation of beings can only be grasped by the individuation of the subject's knowledge.²⁴

²⁰ The law of the excluded middle goes back to Aristotle and can be expressed in logic as well as semantics. It says that any proposition is *either* (as in logics) hold to be *true* (as in semantics) *or* (logics) to express its *negative* (semantics) exclusively. The proposition can be expressed through the following formula: $P \vee \neg P$ (logics); P or not P (semantics).

²¹ Herbert A. Hodges, ed., *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1952)

²² Simondon, *The Position of the Problem of Ontogenesis*, 12.

²³ Simondon, *The Position of the Problem of Ontogenesis*, 12.

²⁴ Ibid., 13.

CHAPTER THREE

ENCOUNTER

Before delving into the elaboration of encounter, which is primarily based on Martin Buber's seminal book *I and Thou*, I would like to emphasize some biographical aspects that may help to elucidate his formative path, philosophical, sociological, and theological background. Of course, I can only touch upon very few aspects of the life and work of a man, with a remarkable history and tremendous intellectual breath, much of which was related to his efforts in securing the rich body of Hasidic folk tradition or, more generally, his Zionist activities. However, there is a somewhat more subversive side to Buber primarily due to his close friendship with Gustav Landauer, a German writer and communitarian anarchist. Landauer, related on his mother's side to Albert Einstein, was a prominent representative of the counterculture during the *Kaiserreich*, and in 1918 was an active participant in the establishment of the Bavarian Soviet Republic in Munich, and was murdered after it was deposed in 1919 by counterrevolutionary militias. Together with Landauer, Buber initiated a circle of intellectuals called the *Forte Kreis*, which first met in 1914. The group formulated what might be called a utopian vision for an anarchistic and peaceful future society, without a concrete plan though for its political instantiation. Born in Vienna in 1878, Buber studied philosophy, art history, and psychology primarily in Vienna and Berlin. His main philosophical influence at the time was the work of Schopenhauer, who elevated hitherto peripheral issues to the rank of primary topics for his philosophical reasoning, such as Indian religious traditions or the Hindu formula of *tat tvam asi* (That you are) reminiscent of the Delphic principle, *gnothi sauton* (Know yourself). The work of Kant and Nietzsche was also to exert a significant influence. In his autobiographical account of his formative years, Buber explicitly counts Georg Simmel and Wilhelm Dilthey among those teachers who bore the strongest influence on his thought in the years between 1898 and 1904. Especially the notion of *Erlebnis* (experience; see lived experience above), which was to play a most eminent role in the thinking of the young Buber, is at the heart of Dilthey's philosophy of life and aims at grasping the notion of shared experience (*miterlebende Erfahrung*) as the fundamental reality of human nature (*menschliches Wesen*).¹

The important observation from the point of view of this thesis is that because of the predominant influence Wilhelm Dilthey's individual-psychological and socio-historical hermeneutics exerted on Buber's formative period, could he build his prevailing interest in philosophical anthropology upon a methodology, which subsequently was termed dialogical principle. Notably, and as a most remarkable convergence with Simondon's *Problem of Ontogenesis*, in 1904 Buber published his thesis on the history of the problem of individuation with a specific focus on the work of Jakob Böhme and Nikolaus Cusanus under the title *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Individuationsproblems*.² However, before I start elaborating on what can be seen as Buber's main work, there is yet another issue brought to bear on the general philosophical category of hermeneutics, namely to draw a distinguishing line between Heidegger's monological being and Buber's dialogical being, a difference especially pertinent from an anthropological perspective and touched upon by Buber himself in his book *Das Problem des Menschen*.³

From this perspective the problem of Heidegger's fundamental ontology is twofold. First of all, although being in its verbal form, that is, the very modality of being or the event of being unfolds on the basis of presupposing the unifying horizon of time, *Da-sein* is exclusively assured in and through itself, a movement that sought to fix the temporality of being through the self-reflective (monological) knowledge about the quiddity (*Washeit*) of the event. The question arises though, whether it would make much of a difference to replace the quiddity of Heidegger's self-identical existence with the self-assuring authenticity of *haecceitas* (*Diesheit*), for the essence of Heidegger's I eventually marks the non-interchangeable, the unique. And indeed, does not Heidegger's sense of being (*Sinn des Seins*), which allegedly precedes any particular being essentially confirm the *Da-sein* of a self-identical I (A=A or I am I)?

To clarify the existentiality of the self, we take as our 'natural' point of departure the everyday self-interpretation of *Da-sein* that expresses 'itself' in saying I. Utterance is not necessary. With the 'I', this being means itself. The content of this expression is taken to be absolutely simple. It always means only me, and nothing further. As this simple thing, the 'I' is not a definition of other things: it is itself not a predicate, but the absolute 'subject'.⁴

¹ The first volume of Buber's *Werkausgabe* published by the Gütersloher Verlagshaus in 2001 has served as the main reference for this paragraph:

Paul Mendes-Flohr and Peter Schäfer, ed., *Martin Buber: Werkausgabe* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001)

² Martin Buber, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Individuationsproblems" (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 1904).

³ Martin Buber, *Das Problem des Menschen* (Gerlingen: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 2007 [1948])

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996 [1927]), 293.

Is not the fundamental distinction of Being and beings meant to secure the place for an originary division (*Urteilung*) outside the I of being there? The second problem of Heidegger's ontology therefore arises out of the question to whom I would be able to refer to as the Other, if not to my own mirror image of a self-conscious I, a possibility Heidegger's logic has singled out from the beginning? Sure, in this sense Heidegger's structure of care was given an existential formula: being-ahead-of-oneself-already-being-in (a world) as being-together-with (inner-worldly beings encountered). But – and here we touch again upon the second problem of Heidegger's ontology – wasn't this notion of care, although implying a coupling together with the Other, not meant to reassure the structural integrity of Da-sein in the face of its primordial being-ahead-of-oneself-already-in? Isn't the sole ontological opening of being there exhausted in a primordial strive to escape the inevitable *Angst* (falling prey) caused by the facticity of the already-being-in (a world) through a desperate process of being-ahead-of-oneself? Heidegger's monolog is destined to reveal itself forever as the chimera of an artificial dialog, for there is no one to reply upon his call.

To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks. The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words. The one primary word is the combination I-Thou, the other primary word is the combination I-It; wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words He and She can replace It. Hence the I of man is also twofold. For the I of the primary word I-Thou is a different I from that of the primary word I-It.

Primary words do not signify things, but they intimate relation. Primary words do not describe something that might exist independently of them, but being spoken they bring about existence. Primary words are spoken from the being.⁵

How powerful Buber's primary words are, what a relief it is to pay witness to the twofold nature of the I of the primary words. Uttered without any primordial anticipation of one's own mortality, the primary words mark an event without the obstacle of a means to an end external to the intimate relation of I and Thou.

The relation to the Thou is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between I and Thou. The memory itself is transformed, as it plunges out of its isolation into the unity of the whole. No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between I and Thou. Desire itself is transformed as it plunges out of its dream into the appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only when every means has collapsed does the meeting come about.⁶

Buber clearly indicates that with the event of being thrown into the world, with the natality of being in its verbal form, the process of individuation has just been initiated, the consciousness of the I has not yet been connected with the knowledge of an objectifying split between the primary existence of the I and the objects of its participate as a world round about the body. What has yet to be separated appears in the fundamental form of *cognosco*, an act of plain perception, the instantiation of primal experience.

Consciousness of the 'I' is not connected with the primitive sway of the instinct for self-preservation any more than with that of the other instincts. It is not the 'I' that wishes to propagate itself, but the body, that knows as yet of no 'I'. It is not the 'I' but the body that wishes to make things, a tool or a toy, that wishes to be a 'creator.' Further, a *cognosco ergo sum*, in however naïve a form and however childlike a conception of an experiencing subject, cannot be found in the primitive function of knowledge. The 'I' emerges as a single element out of the primal experiences, out of the vital primal words I-affecting-Thou and Thou-affecting-I, only after they have been split asunder and the participate has been given eminence as an object.⁷

Obviously the relation is about to proceed from acts of primary perceptions to the recognition of a world round about the subject of cognition. The split between the conscious I and the objects of a world round about has been set up in order to arrange the perception of objects as discrete parts of a continuous and organised sequence of events.

But when the I of the relation has stepped forth and taken on separate existence, it also moves, strangely tenuous and reduced to merely functional activity, into the natural, actual event of the separation of the body from the world round about it, and awakens there the state in which I is properly active. Only now can the conscious act of the I take place. This act is the first form of the primary word I-It, of the experience in its relation to I. The I which stepped forth declares itself to be the bearer, and the world round about to be the object of the perceptions. Of course, this happens in a primitive form and not in the form of a theory of knowledge. But whenever the sentence "I see the tree" is so uttered that it no longer tells of a relation between the man – I – and the tree – Thou –, but establishes the perception of the tree as object by the human consciousness, the barrier between subject and object has been set up. The primary word I-It, the word of separation, has been spoken.⁸

The word of separation is to introduce the very difference between the relational exclusivity of the primary words as opposed to the objectifying arrangement of objects with their specific set of qualities, sunk into the memory of the observer. In the latter case, the scheme of observation lacks the exclusive character and intensity of the immediate act of a temporal relation between I and Thou.

⁵ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 11.

⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁸ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 25.

The Thou appears, to be sure, in space, but in the exclusive situation of what is over against it, where everything else can be only the background out of which it emerges, not its boundary and measured limit. It appears, too, in time, but in that of the event which is fulfilled in itself: it is not lived as part of a continuous and organised sequence, but is lived in a ‘duration’ whose purely intensive dimension is definable only in terms of itself. It appears, lastly, simultaneously as acting and as being acted upon – not, however, linked to a chain of causes, but, in its relation of mutual action with the I, as the beginning and the end of the event. This is part of the basic truth of the human world, that only It can be arranged in order. Only when things, from being our Thou, become our It, can they be co-ordinated. The Thou knows no system of co-ordination.⁹

In this passage Buber does not only clarify the exclusive modality of the primary relation, but also elucidates the function of time in it, namely – and here we’ve got a strong resonance of Bergson’s *la durée*¹⁰ – the duration of acting and being acted upon an experience of simultaneity and as such distinctly set apart from the sequential order of distinct perceptions. The purely intensive dimension of the Thou is what Buber defines as one part of the basic truth, while hinting upon another, namely the capacity to order the world in a moment of utmost lucidity, a historico-epochal opening¹¹ for the transitory emergence of a power that is disruptive rather than constituent of the existing word-order. Herein lies the truly revolutionary dimension of this text, and its call for seizing the historical moment for beginning anew, a quality about which I talk more specifically in the context of Badiou’s *Being and Event*.

But now that we have come so far, it is necessary to set down the other part of the basic truth, without which this would be a useless fragment – namely, a world that is ordered is not the world-order. There are moments of depth in which you look on the world-order fully present. Then in its very flight the note will be heard; but the ordered world is its indistinguishable score. These moments are immortal and most transitory of all, no content may be secured from them, but their power invades creation and the knowledge of man, beams of their power stream into the ordered world and dissolve it again and again. This happens in the history both of the individual and of the race.¹²

Buber provides a lucid testimonial of his formative occupation with the problem of individuation and its relation to the notion of time. Without having to give it a name yet – and I will be returning to this issue later – Buber clearly indicates that the Common or One, i.e. that which precedes every act of separation as subjectivity (resulting from the primary word I-Thou) or individuation of individuals – to use the words of Simondon – is deprived of numeric unity, a pre-individual reality that is outside and common to every I. What emerges out of this presumption – and here we have one of the three relations between the individuated being and the pre-individual reality in Simondon’s ontogenesis – is that the relation I-Thou is conceived itself as a being in its own right, the very encounter from which arises reality. Reality constitutes and reaffirms itself in the process of sharing or conversely: “Where there is no sharing there is no reality.”¹³ Buber’s definition of sharing is strictly consigned to the being in relation, barring any exclusive ability to appropriate for oneself what is shared. However, the I’s degree of reality is measured gradually depending on the fullness of what it shares in relation with the Other without disappearing once the supreme and exclusive relation ceases to exist. It is important to add that in comparison with Heidegger’s focus on the finitude of all *Da-sein*, Buber’s Thou is imbued with the breath of eternal life.

The aim of relation is relation’s own being, that is, contact with the Thou. For through contact with every Thou we are stirred with a breath of the Thou, that is, of eternal life. He who takes his stand in relation shares in a reality, that is, in a being that neither merely belongs to him nor merely lies outside him. All reality is an activity in which I share without being able to appropriate for myself. Where there is no sharing there is no reality. Where there is self-appropriation there is no reality. The more direct the contact with the Thou, the fuller is the sharing. The I is real in virtue of its sharing in reality. The fuller its sharing the more real it becomes. But the I that steps out of the relational event into separations and consciousness of separation, does not lose its reality. Its sharing is preserved in it in a living way. In other words, as is said of the supreme relation and may be used of all, ‘the seed remains in it’. This is the province of subjectivity in which the I is aware with a single awareness of its solidarity of connexion and of its separation.¹⁴

The remarkable movement of Buber’s ontology lies precisely within the twofold awareness of the individual’s solitude and connection with the eternal Thou, without having to resort to the crippled dialectic of being and *Da-sein*. The Other’s embodiment on either side of the spectrum – utmost individuality and eternal fullness of relation – is a matter of degree rather than of kind. What Buber presents us with here, is the dialogical principle of a synchronic concatenation of retreat and renewed relation, a process of maturing spiritually through sharing in being. To “Know thyself”¹⁵ is to assert ones individuality through a particular kind of being, while the essence of true being is its unconditioned relation to an unparticipated Thou.

⁹ Ibid., 29-30.

¹⁰ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*

¹¹ Agamben, *Potentialities*, 106.

¹² Buber, *I and Thou*, 29-30.

¹³ Ibid., 52.

¹⁴ Buber, *I and Thou*, 52.

¹⁵ On this note, I would like to mention Foucault’s instructive genealogy of what he calls technologies of the self, where he elaborates that “in Greek and Roman texts, the injunction of having to know yourself was always associated with the other principle of having to take care of yourself, and it was that need to care for oneself that brought the Delphic maxim into operation.” (Huck