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Ontology of the Possible: On the Structure of the Object

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Abstract: This paper, through a realist reading of Husserlian phenomenology, aims to explain how the consciousness-sense has access to reality and, in general, to objectivity. There is a ‘strife’ between the essence of a thing and the specific concreteness in which it always becomes manifest, such that the identical object is indicated by changeable predicates, but at the same time always distinguishes itself from them. Language can express the evidence of the thing – which makes the determinable aspects of the thing exist and which is inexpressible through definitions – only “for conjectures”, showing the difference between its own expression and the thing. And it can do this by analogy, the only device that exhibits the antinomic relationship between the object and its determinations, and, in the meantime, makes possible not so much their composition, but rather their transformation. Analogy, in fact, operating through a logic of contradiction, grasps, within each object, the tension between the element of permanence and the element of emergency; shows how the object is a unity-without-a-mixture of absolutely distinct forms; and so it comes to think about the relationship between the in-definable forms of the *possible* representations of the thing and the *impossible* expression of its singularity.

Keywords: Husserlian Phenomenology, Ontology, Structure of Objects, Substance and Appearances, Singularity, Realism and Interpretation, Conjecture, Dialetheic Logic, Gluon Theory, Analogy

1 The experience of consciousness

As Husserl pointed out in the fourth part of the First Book of *Ideen*, one of the great *problems of reason* – the formulation and the clarification of which will become my aim in this essay – is to explain how the consciousness-‘sense’ has access to reality and, in general, to ‘objectivity’¹, that is, to confront the question of what the ‘claim’ of consciousness actually to ‘relate’ to something objective properly signifies². Is it possible to describe the “objective something” *which* is an object of consciousness, avoiding all ‘subjective’ expressions³, i.e. *the mode* in which it is an object of consciousness? Or each statement must ultimately be

¹ It is opportune to specify immediately – even if this will be clear from the continuation of the essay – that Husserlian phenomenology is not a ‘philosophy of access’ *tout court*, which deals only with thinking about the access of humans to being and that, therefore, affirms that, when I claim to access a thing in itself, I actually access a *datum*, for which I cannot abstract from the fact that it is strictly related to the access that I have, and that doesn’t make any sense conceivable outside this access, in whatever way it is conceived. Husserlian phenomenology, that is, doesn’t reduce reality to that small portion of it directly available to humans. In fact, it doesn’t rule out ‘thinking’ what Meillassoux calls the ‘*great outdoors*’ (*le grand Dehors*), the ‘*absolute outside*’ (*le Dehors absolu*), the reality understood by how it is, that outside which is not relative to us, and which is given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not. This implies that the question of the object, which we’ll discuss in what follows, is not an epistemological question, not a question of *how we know* the object, but an ontological question, which concerns *what objects are*. As has been remarked several times by Harman and Bryant in their works, despite the limits of access, we must avoid, at all costs, the thesis that objects *are* only what our access to objects *gives* us.

² Husserl, *Ideas I*, 300.

³ *Ibid.*, 312.

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traced back to subjective acts? And if so, what guarantees that reality corresponds to how we think it is? If every knowledge depends on the knowing subject and it is an event that happens inside a mind understood as a theater or a box where there are *images of things*, what guarantees that these images correspond to something real in the external world?

In all our activities, in all our experiences – Husserl says –, what is stated, what is predicated, what is affirmed or denied, always refers to ‘something’. This ‘something’ is the central point of connection of the predicates⁴, their support, the ‘bearer’ of the determinations, their *substratum*, “but in no way is it a unity of them in the sense in which any complex, any combination, of the predicates would be called a unity. It is necessarily to be distinguished from them although not to be placed alongside and separated from them; just as, conversely, they are *its* predicates: unthinkable without it, yet distinguishable from it”⁵. In the continuous and synthetical course of consciousness, in the act that operates synthetically as the principle of unification and objectification, the *objectum* is constantly given, but always differently⁶; the object is always ‘*the same*’, but ‘it’ “shows itself only from different sides” and, therefore, is “given in other predicates with a different determination-content”⁷. In short, in giving itself to the consciousness, the *objectum* remains unchanged; and, however, ‘it’, the identical, becomes altered. For Husserl, “no Object is conceivable without there also being conceivable multiple intensive mental processes, connected in continuous or in properly synthetical unity – processes in which ‘it’, the Object, is intended to as an identical object and yet in a noetically different mode”⁸. There is a *fundamental tension* in the phenomena: on the one hand, they have specific intuitive properties by which they are known; on the other hand, they are unified forms that cement these properties together as belonging to a one distinct object⁹. There is a ‘strife’ between the essence of a thing and the specific concreteness in which it always becomes manifest¹⁰, such that the identical *objectum* is indicated by ‘the changeable and alterable predicates’, but at the same time always distinguishes itself from them in an evident way, because the substance of the being itself is irreducible to the depiction of the state of fact, on the basis of a logic of relationships. The ‘determinable subject of its possible predicates’, what makes the thing individually itself, the *pure X* in abstraction from the determinateness of its representations, always is separated as *central noematic moment*, as the innermost moment of the *noema* (the object of the conscious act), from the predicates. It can be said, then, that if the ‘*object simpliciter*’, the pure determinable *X*, the pure subject of predicating, is identical, the object ‘*in the How of its determinations*’ is, instead, changeable. But if every image of a state of things presupposes and implies the reference to this ‘something’, without the ‘something’ there can be no ‘determining content’, no presentation of the object in a determinate manner in the experience and, consequently, no ‘sense’¹¹. In its *appearance*, the phenomenon is an effective trace, a sign, an index of the *substance* of the thing, without which nothing could appear. This is the ‘turbulent structure of objects’, for which they are, at the same time, immanent and transcendent, austerely unified and, at the same time, sparkling with qualities¹².

Every object, therefore, is the difference between its identity, which is essentially concrete, and its being-represented. Through the different forms of its appearance and of its being represented, the *X*-thing,

⁴ As Drummond noted, this ‘something’ is both the (ontological) ‘bearer’ of predicates (better, attributes) and the (logical) subject of predicates. See Drummond, “The Doctrine of the Noema”, 266.

⁵ Husserl, *Ideas*, 313.

⁶ For Husserl, the field of consciousness is never an inarticulate sheet of sparkling perceptual data, upon which it imposes a grid of solid entities. Intentionality is an *objectifying* act that provides us with objects – which, therefore, have already sliced up the world into separate pieces – and not with raw sense data. See Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, 26.

⁷ Husserl, *Ideas I*, 313.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 314. Drummond emphasizes how the object is the identity presenting itself in each noematic moment and in each set of noematic moments rather than the whole of noematic moments. The identical object, although not ontologically distinct from the noemata (its modes of presentation), is not reducible to any single noema or to any set, including the whole set, of noemata. Any object, at any level of the world, has a reality that can be explored endlessly and viewed from infinite perspectives without ever being exhausted by the sum of these perspectives. See Drummond, “The Doctrine of the Noema”, 268.

⁹ Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹ Husserl, *Ideas I*, 315.

¹² Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, 32.

which we always refer to, is facing us just like the unspeakable of the same appearance¹³, like that ‘reality’ that cannot be entirely translatable and, thence, knowable¹⁴. For this reason, the *thing-in-itself* is not, as Hegel has claimed¹⁵, the *complete abstractum*, something entirely *empty*, determined only as a *beyond*, the *negative* of representation; nor *the product* of thought, that has progressed to pure abstraction. Pure X is by no means the absolutely abstract, the absolutely Other from every determination, but *the very own* of every being, immanent to its appearance and which in its appearance is hidden, since all that appears, appears in relation to other; it is the singularity of the object that cannot be seen in its ineffability except when it is mentioned in the relationship with others. Thus, if the manifestation of the *thing* is always only one-sided, ‘imperfect’, however, what is manifested is this same thing, the whole in conformity with its total sense, though only one-sidedly intuited and, moreover, multifariously indeterminate. We must not separate what ‘properly’ appears from the ‘thing’, as if this latter were totally independent of its appearances. The correlate of what ‘properly’ appears is a *non-self-sufficient* part, which can have its unity and selfsufficiency of sense only in a whole which *necessarily* includes in itself empty components and indeterminate components. Husserl writes: “Of essential necessity something physically real [...] appears only ‘inadequately’ in a closed appearance”¹⁶; “of essential necessity there are only [...] inadequately appearing [...] objects”¹⁷. Therefore, *perfect givenness* is predesignated as ‘*Idea*’ (in the Kantian sense, that – I’m fully convinced – recovers the Greek ancient notion of the *eidos*, essence, as a necessary and universal structure or form of things). And this idea designates

a system which, in its eidetic type, is an absolutely determined system of endless processes of continuous appearances, or as a field of these processes, an a priori determined *continuum of appearances* with different, but determined, dimensions, and governed throughout by a fixed set of eidetic laws. This continuum is determined more precisely as infinite [many-dimensional] on all sides, consisting of appearances in all its phases of the same determinable X so ordered in its concatenations and so determined with respect to the essential contents that any of its *lines* yields, in its continuous course, a harmonious concatenation [...] in which the X, given always as one and the same, is more precisely and never ‘otherwise’ continuously-harmoniously determined¹⁸.

Idea, thus, is *the pure determinable*, what from time to time is determined, and every determination is nothing but a step closer to that ‘idea’, an attempt to grasp it more ‘closely’, even if we can never claim to have expressed or represented it¹⁹. If an act only finitely mobile is inconceivable by virtue of the all-sided infinity of the *continuum*, however the idea of this continuum and the idea of perfect givenness prefigured by the idea of the continuum (in which the awareness that the X-datum cannot find expression otherwise than as an idea is expressed) is then nevertheless presented in *intellectual seeing*: “seeing intellectually that this infinity of necessity cannot be given does not exclude, but rather requires, the intellectually seen givenness of the *idea* of this infinity”²⁰.

Let’s see better how this idea of perfect givenness must be understood. I tried to say until now how the Eidos, *True-Being*, which belongs to the logical form of the speech, is correlatively equivalent to the Eidos, *Adequately-Given and To-Be-Evidentially Positable*. But this latter, Husserl specifies, is to be understood either in the sense of finite givenness – and, in this case, being is ‘immanent’ being, being as closed

13 Cacciari, *Labirinto filosofico*, 315. Things are inherently *deeper than their traits*, reason for why “the nature of substance remains a mystery”; Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, 78.

14 “Reality” is the resistance of existence that is not entirely absorbed in knowledge; it’s the positivity that is not resolved in thought and that always comes back to come forward; it’s the being as concrete *noumenon* – and not as object of thought – which is above all opacity, aconceptuality, unintelligibility, non-sense on which the sense, knowledge, intelligibility are constituted; it’s reality with its hardness that doesn’t need to be said, because it exists, resists and breaks; it’s that “something” that is always there and that surprises us, that exceeds our conceptual schemes and our perceptual apparatuses. Cf. Ferraris, “Esistere è resistere”.

15 Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, 89.

16 Husserl, *Ideas I*, 331.

17 Ibid., 342.

18 Ibid.

19 Cacciari, *Labirinto filosofico*, 315.

20 Husserl, *Ideas I*, 343.

mental process or noetic mental process-correlate – or in the sense of givenness in the form of an idea – and, in this case, “being is transcendent being, i.e., being, the ‘transcendence’ of which inheres precisely in the infinity of the noematic correlate which it requires as the ‘material’ of being”²¹. The correlation between ‘givenness in the form of an idea’ and True-Being is shown in the difference, which Husserl establishes, between ‘adequate’ presentive intuition and ‘transcendent’ presentive intuition: “when a presentive intuition is *adequate* and *immanent*, then, to be sure, it is not sense and object which coalesce but, instead, originarily fulfilled sense and object. The object is precisely that which is seized upon”²². Instead, “when the presentive intuition is one of *something transcendent to it*, then something objective cannot become adequately given; only the *idea* of that something objective can be given, or else of its sense and its ‘epistemic essence’, and accordingly there can be given an a priori rule for law-conforming infinities of inadequate experiences”²³. On the ground of this rule, how the further course of experiences must proceed certainly cannot be unambiguously determined. “To the contrary, infinitely many possibilities remain open, but which are prefigured with respect to their type by the a priori governing rules so very rich in content”²⁴. Therefore, the idea of pre-determined givenness with respect to any determination should not be understood as a last dimension of the thing, as if identity also consists in an appearance of the thing, as far as inaccessible to us; to the contrary, “in it we see the ‘point’ or the X from which originate *infinite possibilities* of the thing itself, the polyvalence of the perspectives according to which it makes sense to say ‘that is’. Identity is ‘what’ makes the thing possible in the infinite, not pre-determinable, modes of its appearance, and accordingly of its being-phenomenon, and thence of its being adequately understood”²⁵. Therefore, every object must be considered as the original power that opens up to its infinite possibilities and which can only be expressed as its *idea*, as that ‘thing’ that “*points ahead* to possible perceptual multiplicities which, merging continuously into one another, join together to make up the unity of one perception in which the continuously enduring physical thing is always showing some new ‘sides’ (or else an old ‘side’ as returning) in a new series of adumbrations”²⁶. To put it with Putnam, perception is always *transactional*; we are aware of ourselves as in *interaction* with our perceptual objects, reason for why I am aware of a series of visual, tactile, etc., perspectives on the thing and, then, of the multiple *modes of appearance* of the object (including those that depend on the condition of the percipient subject), without ceasing to perceive the thing as an object that does not change as those perspectives change²⁷.

This idea of the givenness of the thing, from which every determinable proceeds, without in turn it can be demonstrated, is what Husserl calls ‘*transcendent*’, expressly the real unity of physicalness-perception and consciousness-science, which transcends the limit of both²⁸. The thing is ‘transcendent’ inasmuch as it cannot be immanently perceived and therefore, in general, be found in the connection of experiences: inasmuch as it overflows any momentary phase of consciousness²⁹. And yet, this transcendent should not

21 Ibid. As Bogost has explained, *transcendence* in the Husserlian sense is “a concrete and individual notion, one that grips the fiery-hot, infinitely dense molten core of an object and projects it outside, where it becomes its own unit, a new and creative unit operation for a particular set of interactions”; Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 32.

22 Husserl, *Ideas I*, 343.

23 Ibid., §144.

24 Ibid., 343.

25 Cacciari, *Labirinto filosofico*, 316.

26 Husserl, *Ideas I*, 94. Bryant also claims that the substantiality of objects is an absolutely individual system or organization of powers. Powers are the capacities of an object or what it can do and the qualities of an object are local manifestations of its power. But the domain of power possessed by an object is always greater than any local manifestation or actualization of an object. It is evident how Bryant recovers the Deleuzian concept of ‘virtual’, which is that substantiality, that structure and those singularities that endure as the object undergoes qualitative transformations at the level of local manifestations. Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects*, 89.

27 Putnam, “Are Appearances ‘Qualia’?”, 159.

28 Husserl, *Ideas I*, 82: “*consciousness and physicalness are a combined whole*”.

29 Ibid., 89. As Harman points out, you cannot get a noumenon by adding up an infinite number of phenomena, since a real object cannot be built of images. Instead of finitude being a sad limitation on human thought, it becomes the positive character of all entities that exist. Therefore, object-oriented philosophy, taking seriously Kant’s thesis on finitude, is a metaphysics of a “post-critical” kind. See Harman, *Bells and Whistles*, ch. 11.

be understood as a 'state' of the thing, as that impossible 'thing' which is not object of the senses, but as *the object itself*, considered as 'what' cannot be sensibly intuited of it, but only thought in relation to its being-phenomenon: "The spatial physical thing which we see is, with all its transcendence, still something perceived, given 'in person' in the manner peculiar to consciousness. It is not the case that, in its stead, a picture or a sign is given"³⁰. Thus, transcendent, that is 'not determinable', is "the inseparable unity of identity-*singularitas*, givenness-perception and phenomenon-representation, for which no representation is given without reference to phenomenon, no phenomenon is given without reference to the immediate of perception, and no experience is given except in constitutive relationship with that which is inexpressible in it"³¹.

2 Logic of relationship: realism and interpretation

We can understand, then, how Husserlian phenomenology is placed on the side of realism and not of anti-realism, which asserts that truth is only a coherent system of internally justified assertions and that systems are determined by reference to some ideal of completeness in accordance with axiomatic or transcendental principles or chosen on pragmatic grounds. And yet, Husserlian realism is certainly not archaic realism, founded on the isomorphism between thought (or language) and reality and, consequently, on the correspondence theory of truth which asserts a necessary relation of adequation (*adaequatio*) between, on the one side, ideas or propositions or noemata understood as ontologically distinct and distinctive mental or abstract entities and, on the other side, objects or states of affairs themselves. In fact, Husserlian realism does not conceive logical, mathematical, and scientific objectivities as fully formed and waiting to confront us. To the contrary, it requires the exercise of the mind in order to bring them to presence, a mental activity which, however, does not create *ex nihilo*, but is grounded in more immediate experiences of the real world and, therefore, is guided by the features of the world and the objects therein³².

Husserl wants to grasp the sense of a 'constitutive reason of things', so as to build not a naive realism, but rather a founded one and hence capable of overcoming skeptical objections. So the preliminary methodological apparatus of the *epoché* 'suspends' the validity of the natural attitude, by virtue of which 'the world exists' and is 'there for us', 'on hand'³³, not to deny its validity, not to question its existence, but, on the contrary, to be able to understand how such truth and validity can be proven through an investigation that captures the 'pure' sense of our relationship with the phenomenal world, with our 'surrounding world'³⁴. Therefore, the phenomenological analysis aims to show how it is just the way in which phenomena *are given* that authorizes to place a world existing in itself. The method of 'parenthesizing' aims at the discovery of a 'new scientific domain', which has with the reality a relationship that is no longer 'naive and direct' and that, accordingly, transforms the experience of the ego as subject of acts in something 'new and different'. The ego is not an ontological reality, but that 'region' that the *epoché*, as a 'methodical operation', makes it possible to consider in its intentional correlation with the intrinsic sense of the giving of the experiential regions of our surrounding world³⁵. The suspension of judgment, the 'parenthesizing' of the natural attitude are, hence, instruments to distance from a psychology of empiric kind, which brought back every product of reason and every claim of validity to the bio-psychic structure of subjectivity, as well as from a comparative one that, especially with Dilthey, had led to the establishment of historicism within the empirical life of the spirit, dissolving the idea of truth in the relativity of historical contexts. Husserl tries to introduce a way of looking at phenomena in which they present themselves as 'reduced', that is, a way that allows us not to observe them in their empirical singularity, but to seek out their 'pure' characterizations, i.e. recurring in the variety of the contingent. 'Reduce' (*re-ducere*) means making sure that *the things themselves*, as they

³⁰ Husserl, *Ideas I*, 92.

³¹ Cacciari, *Labirinto filosofico*, 317-318.

³² Drummond, *Husserlian Intentionality*, 269-270.

³³ Husserl, *Ideas I*, 51.

³⁴ Ibid., §32.

³⁵ Franzini, "Introduzione", XIX.

are, show themselves, reveal themselves to us. The phenomenological reduction, in other words, ‘tends’ to make things turn out to be that ‘phenomenon’ in which being ‘gives itself’ in an authentic and original way. The Husserlian ‘realistic’ model is therefore characterized as the carrying out of the essential sense – id est, of the intrinsic qualities of our ‘seeing’ – of the obviousness that arise as phenomena, which are neither projections of an abstract ego nor reducible to the acts in which they manifest themselves, but “correlates of a kinesthetic, bodily and interbodily, system in which the thingness is the passive horizon of a function that always has reality as its referent and has in the ‘how’ of this reference [...] the experiential trace of the process of which it is protagonist”³⁶. The meaning appears *to* the subject, but is not produced *by* the subject. Intentionality does not construct the reality, but aims *to make it appear* and, for this reason, has a ‘revealing’ character.

At this point, it is necessary to ask: does a realism conceived in this way exclude interpretation? So far we have seen how *phenomenon* is the thing that *is inasmuch as it appears to us*, inasmuch as our perceiving it as appearance is constitutive of it, and how no phenomenon is given as pure or im-mediated (because what appears to us presupposes the a priori forms of sensibility, space and time), as much as the thing-in-itself is not given to perception. We can easily understand, then, that ‘real’ is the observed thing, the thing ‘altered’ by observation, ‘interpreted’. But this does not at all mean de-ontologizing philosophy and reducing it to epistemology. On the contrary, as Cacciari has observed, it is precisely this perspective that allows the most accurate understanding-measurement of the object: “The presupposition of every ‘realism’ is to understand that the thing exists in its being-other, that is, in the complex of perception, observation, measurement, predicating. ‘Realism’ is the awareness that the thing, resultant of the totality of perspectives on the basis of which it can be grasped, is an idea-limit, effective because it regulates research, but not a determining concept”³⁷. In fact, every determination is reductive and can measure only some aspects of the object, because we can never have a simultaneous knowledge of the whole. Therefore, any panoptic view has no ground, because every object can only be grasped from a point of view, according to a perspective.

But did not the Nietzschean *Perspektiven-Lehre* also assert this? For Nietzsche it is impossible to immobilize the polychromy and polymorphism of existence, the infinite unfolding of his senses, of his wealth of figures, directions, combinations and movements. Things, as well as subjects, are to be understood as complex appearances, as intertwined surfaces, as stratified masks; they are *a continually evolving complex* that can only be designated as “streams”, as “flowing forces”³⁸, and must therefore be grasped as an infinite plurality of elements, moments and points of view. Nietzsche wrote in *The Gay Science*: “Do we really want to demote existence in this way to an exercise in arithmetic and an indoor diversion for mathematicians? Above all, one shouldn’t want to strip it of its *ambiguous* character: that, gentlemen, is what *good* taste demands – Above all, the taste of reference for everything that lies beyond your horizon!”³⁹. This polymorphism, precisely because it is never entirely definable, graspable and catalogable, invites us to decipherment and infinite decoding, to dance, to play, to laughter, to *interpretation*, that is to the continuous exercise of intelligence as activity of an *intus legere* that we know that it is impeded to draw the object in-itself. Therefore, the adventure of knowledge, the “bliss of the unhappiness of knowledge”⁴⁰, consists in an infinite interpretation: “the world has once again become infinite to us: insofar as we cannot reject the possibility *that it includes infinite interpretations*”⁴¹. It is evident, then, that the practice of never-ending interpretation, of *interminable hermeneutics*, is the only ‘adequate’ way – precisely because it is *never* adequate, finite, definitive – to *describe*, and not to explain⁴², these continually evolving complexes that constitute the world. Indeed, every interpretation, just because is not an *explanation*, is itself “fluid, elusive, yielding”. Nothing is ever comprehensible, graspable and hence explicable, because every fact and every moment, every word and every experience, are always richer, more exuberant, more ‘strong’ than any

³⁶ Franzini, “Introduzione”, XLV.

³⁷ Cacciari, *Labirinto filosofico*, 321.

³⁸ Nietzsche, *eKGWB*, NF 1881, 11[163].

³⁹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 238.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *eKGWB*, NF 1880, 7[165].

⁴¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 239-240.

⁴² Nietzsche, *eKGWB*, NF 1885, 2[82].

network of judgments or explanations that intends to capture them. No type of hermeneutics, ergo, can presume to conclude, to establish the proper sense, original and fundamental, of a thing, an event or a text, since the range of motivations that make the thing exist is inexhaustible, the quantity and the quality of the circumstances in which it occurs are elusive and the fans of the effects it generates are unreachable. In other words: every thing is impenetrable because it is *infinitely* 'penetrable', i.e. infinitely *interpretable*; that is to say: because it is an inexhaustible *text*, an infinite field where infinite interpretations come into play and in conflict⁴³. Every *thing* becomes a *dispersed object*, a multi-verse in expansion, a constellation of forces eternally in action, a galaxy of perspectives so changeable in number and quality that every definition is overwhelmed and every classification is shattered.

Therefore, it is impossible to go back to *the meaning* and, however, *the meaning*, in itself unattainable, is the *dynamis*, "the force, the energy that generates and moves the activity of interpreting"⁴⁴. There is interpretation because there is an *intention* to reach *this meaning*. The need to interpret arises only when we find ourselves in presence of an irreducible otherness. "Interpretation is driven by the desire to re-present the meaning of the text; it originates, indeed, from the assumption that this meaning actually exists, as well as that the thing is a complex and an overlapping of perspectives does not eliminate at all the reference to its substance"⁴⁵. The substance of the thing (as well as of the 'text') is the *dynamis*, the power that makes the determinable aspects of the thing exist and, at the same time, the diversity of interpretations. These aspects and this diversity appear – but always appear in reference to that *dynamis*: they constitute its re-velation. Therefore, the ground of the thing shows itself as unspeakable, not because language is impotent or ineffective, but because the Possible where every ground must be *thought* is indeterminable, unrepresentable, and to predicate it would signify not understanding its meaning. *The* unattainable meaning as well as the thing in itself *really are*, inasmuch as they represent themselves in the energy that moves the questioning-interpreting. Interpretation seeks an absence and tries to say what in the context of the dicible is absent, but which manifests itself in the research, in the direction it assumes and in the signs that accompany its *logos*⁴⁶. Hence every word signals this absence and in itself continually expresses it, but it will never be able to coincide with it, as no predicating can correspond to the singularity of the object. Each nomination overlooks the unspeakable-unrepresentable and, for this reason, "always *transcends itself*, because it recognizes 'what' always transcends it and which is nothing other than the *realissimum*, the maximally concrete of the being itself"⁴⁷.

The attraction that the absent meaning exerts is an ineliminable *reality*, as well as the attraction of the thing in itself or substance is a reality, since without it the phenomenal appearance wouldn't be conceivable. This absence is, therefore, effective power, because it opens, originates, makes possible. And interpretation, in turn, will be so powerful, the more it will be able to sign it. And it will be able only by showing *the difference* between its own expression and the thing, between its own manifesting-representing and the truth, only by *saying pollachôs*, saying through the many possible modes of facing and predicating the being or the text that there are in front of us, both *phainomena*, in the awareness of the truth that they keep in themselves and that re-veil appearing to us⁴⁸.

The idea of interpretation I'm advocating, and which emancipates itself from the anti-realism of the hermeneutics of postmodern kind, is explicitly linked with that of the Cusanian *conjecture*. As Cacciari writes:

the conjecture presupposes the *reality* of what we are looking for and in general the possibility that we can express it. This possibility is, so to speak, every time denied, and every time reaffirmed. Given a hypothesis, we come to formulate a con-

⁴³ In this wake we can find Putnam's approach, according to which the possibility of new insights, new perspectives and new conceptual and empirical possibilities to be taken into account is always open and, therefore, the philosophical tasks are never really brought to completion. In other words, in philosophy there is no last word.

⁴⁴ Cacciari, *Labirinto filosofico*, 325.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 326.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 330.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 326-327.

jecture; once we verify the conjecture, we conclude that it is not capable of exhaustively predicating the reality (the ‘text’) in front of it, the *problem* it confronts against; then we propose new hypotheses and formulate new conjectures. In other words: when we find an ‘image’ that seems coherent with the reality we try to represent, we seek again their *difference*; and when we find it, at this new level, we seek among the distinct ones a more radical reason for unity. Spiral climbing up, the process wraps itself on itself. Last step will also be a conjecture and the ground only for subsequent ones; it *leaves* that their possibility be, it *gives place* to the other. Far from closing in itself, every step is moved by the need to be ‘overcome’, precisely because it is conscious of being a conjecture, in dialogue not only with those preceding and close but also with those future. *Meaning* can never be ‘liquidated’ in the play of interpretations, since they exist precisely because they intend to express it. Its *reality* exists as well as the conjectures that approximate it, or that preserve in themselves the approach to it as their end or idea. Dividing the two dimensions is a pure abstraction⁴⁹.

Every determinate statement, every defined image is, therefore, a conjecture about the substance of the thing. And yet, the *res* that we intend to represent, even if it appears to be re-veiling itself in the conjecture, which preserves in itself without ever exhausting the energy of research and interrogation, remains different from any form of interpretation.

3 Analogy and logic of contradiction

But what is the idea behind conjecture and, consequently, behind interpretation, as has been outlined so far? I have said that any definition of the thing is inadequate to grasp what the object is really ‘in’ and ‘for’ itself, the thing in its singularity, what makes this being ‘single’, because every definition we give of any being places it in relation to that which is other from it. The most real, the *realissimum*, what constitutes the ‘this’ of a thing, its *tode ti*⁵⁰, escapes the system of relationships that is science, cannot be grasped through the definitory discourse because, when we define any object, we can do it only through its resemblance to another from itself, through its affinities, through its being and its non-being. But the perfect singularity of the thing itself cannot be grasped in the web of definitions, judgments, concepts, not because it is mysterious, but because it is quite evident. And language can express the evidence of the thing, which is inexpressible through definitions, only *indirectly*. Only ‘by conjecture’ can we point to the *realissimum*, to what the thing truly and really is in itself, to the object in its absolute peculiarity, in its absolute singularity, to that for which the thing is absolutely and unconditionally itself. But this means having assumed the criterion and the perspective angle of *analogy*. A kind of analogy that, obviously, has nothing to do with the onto-theological *analogia entis*, but that, on the contrary, is purified from any synthetic-conciliatory claim, from every ‘representative’ instance and from any idea of equivocal similarity, as is presented, for example, in Enzo Melandri’s philosophical work, which has been too long ignored and misunderstood, but which is one of the most radical and intense expressions of European thought in the twentieth century. In the analogy thus re-interpreted, there is shown the participation among ontologically distinct aspects of the thing, of only one of which something is properly predicated, while the other is expressed in its inexhaustible tending towards. The *life* of the analogical form, of the analogical thinking, consists basically “in precisely describing the *dynamics* of a reality towards its ultimate ‘place’, where it [...] touches its boundary”⁵¹. For this reason, analogy does not end in rigid and dead definitions, but wants to connect and express the *sympathy* between the distinct forms of the thing, which appear such in full evidence just where they finally touch each other. The analogical way leads,

through relationship between the distinct forms that constitute the unity without mixing of each figure, to the *point* where this unity re-veals its own undoubted singular im-mediacy. There is no ‘proportion’ between *this* singularity and the complex, in-definable at the limit, of the forms that animate it (since every figure is an indefinable multiplicity of references and echoes), and neither is there full, perfect *symbolism* (since the distinction between the *own* unity of the figure and

⁴⁹ Ibid., 332.

⁵⁰ This is what Harman really calls ‘object’. See, for example, *The Quadruple Object*, Section 8B: “an object is anything that has a unified reality that is autonomous from its wider context and also from its own pieces”; it is a unitary entity irreducible to its components or its effects on the surrounding environment.

⁵¹ Cacciari, *Della cosa ultima*, 502.

that ‘countable’ unit for which it is related to the others remains evident). And yet the immediate singularity of each figure is in no way absolutizable from the complex of the forms that compose it⁵².

Therefore, what I am trying to suggest here is that analogy is the device which, in the antinomic relationship between the ‘thing’ and its determinations, exhibits their logical inevitability and, in the meantime, makes possible not so much their composition, but rather their displacement and their transformation. In other words, analogy allows us to convert in a different way the binary opposition which defines the givenness of the thing, transforming the dichotomous opposition, that is rigid, scalar and contradictory, into a dipolar opposition, that is tensional, vectorial and contrary. What is at stake is not, in fact, the elimination or the defeat of one of the two contenders, but their mutual transformation⁵³. In the analogy, the principle of excluded third, which dominates the Western logic based on the principle of contradiction (*firmissimum omnium principiorum*) and which consists in the complete and exclusive disjunction of the two truth values (‘true’ and ‘false’), is replaced by the principle of included third, in which ‘true’ and ‘false’ are no longer contradictory terms, but only contrary to each other, and, hence, are the two extremes among which all the intermediate gradations can subsist.

However, it is not a matter of thinking of a new logic that must replace the binary one: as Agamben writes in “Archeology of an archeology”, the foreword to the recent Italian re-edition of Melandri’s *opus magnum*, analogy “intervenes in logical dichotomies at the point of their most extreme and paralyzing divarication, not to compose them in a superior synthesis, but to transform them into a force field traversed by polar tensions, in which they lose their substantial identity”⁵⁴. But, then, in what sense and in what way *tertium datur*? The third is attested

through the de-identification and neutralization of the first two, which now become the poles of a field of vector tensions. The third is this field, and nothing else. If one tries to grasp it by cutting the field and isolating a point (or a set of points) therein, what is obtained is only a zone of indifference or undecidability between the two poles. But this indifference is creative and productive, in the sense that, by neutralizing dichotomy, it opens a way out between the two extremes, a kind of immanent overtaking that constitutes a new starting point⁵⁵.

Analogy, in other words, implies a continuous infringement of the law of non-contradiction or, better, it is the logic of contradiction, which begins where the principles of excluded third and of elementary identity no longer prevail; it is the logic of more than two values of truth, the logic of complementarity by contrariety, which implies an opposition no longer dichotomous and substantial, but bipolar and tensile, in which the two terms are neither removed nor composed in a higher unity, but remain in a charged with tensions coexistence, which therefore admits any intermediate gradation⁵⁶.

Thus understood, the contradictory logic of analogy is a *dialetheic logic*⁵⁷, a paradoxical logic in which A can be both true and false, as well as its negation⁵⁸. To better understand the dialetheic character of analogy, it is necessary to recall the “Gluon Theory” theorized by Graham Priest in his latest work, “One”, in which he examines the singularity of the thing, our most fundamental notion, since one cannot say anything,

52 Ibid., 504-505.

53 Agamben, “Archeologia di un’archeologia”, XVI. I think there may be a point of intersection between my reflection on analogy and that one on metaphor made by Graham Harman in *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, ch. 8 and in *Object-Oriented Ontology*, ch. 2. For Harman, in fact, metaphor generates tangible interference between two of the poles of the thing: its underlying reality and its ‘sensual’ profile. After all, Bogost affirms that “*the only way to perform alien phenomenology is by analogy*”; Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 64.

54 Agamben, “Archeologia di un’archeologia”, XVII.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., XXIX.

57 *Dialetheia* is such a statement that both it, A, and its negation, $\neg A$, are true; in other words, it is a statement that is both true and false, a figure that, like two-faced Janus, shows both the face of truth and that of falsehood. It is, in short, a *double truth*. The term *dialetheism*, as the view that admits that some contradictions are true, was coined by Graham Priest and Richard Routley in 1981. See Priest, Routley and Norman, eds., *Paraconsistent Logic*, XX.

58 See Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic*, 25-32. Claiming that objects withdraw even while appearing is equivalent to claiming that objects exhibit $p \wedge \neg p$.

think anything, cognize anything, without presupposing it. Priest starts from the consideration that every object is both one and many. But being one and, at the same time, being many implies a contradiction. How is it possible? How do many parts or many figures of the object form a whole? What makes something *one*? What is it that ‘glues’ an object together into a unity? We can say ‘many’ only because we see a unity of this manifold. Unity is more than just the sum of its parts, since, so that there is a unity, the parts must also be appropriately related. But merely *relating* is insufficient for *unifying*. There must be something else that makes them *one*. Priest calls this the ‘gluon’ of the object and the explanation of how it is that the gluon manages to unite the parts in an object is that it is identical with each of them. The gluon bonds with each part in the most intimate way, by being identical with it, and so joins them, although the parts are not identical either. Therefore, given an object, *x*, a gluon for *x* is an object which, by being identical to all and only the parts of *x*, unifies them into one whole⁵⁹. A gluon, then, is and is not an entity. It can’t be an entity, because it must be what explains the unification of the object and, if to explain what unifies parts *a*, *b*, *c* into a unity, we appeal to another part, *g*, we still have a plurality and we must ask again what unifies *a*, *b*, *c* ... and *g*, thus ending up falling back into an infinite regress. Yet there must be a unifying entity. And this is precisely the gluon, which, for this reason, is an entity, albeit a contradictory one⁶⁰. We have, then, an aporia. Whatever it is that constitutes the unity of an entity must itself both be and not be an entity⁶¹. But if we accept that gluons both are and are not objects, then we have to accept that some contradictions are true. Gluons are part of a paraconsistent logic, as they are dialetheic, that is, they have contradictory properties⁶², but they do not lead to an explosion of logic. Priest’s theory is certainly more sophisticated than I have presented it. However, for the purpose of this essay, what has been said is more than sufficient.

To summarize, I argue that analogy captures within each figure the tension between the element of permanence and the element of emergence and thus leads to the singularity that can never be univocally determined by the principle of non-contradiction. Analogy does not violate it at all; it shows how one and the same figure reflects infinite others figures and reflects itself in them without its identity dissolving. Rather, it shows just how this figure remains itself as a unity-without-a-mixture of absolutely distinct forms. Analogy presupposes this multiplicity exactly as the principle of non-contradiction (this figure is itself and not *other* than itself). But *this singularity*, im-mediated, ir-relative, is given. And there is the paradox of the relationship of analogical *discourse* with *this* un-speakable. ‘This’ is what analogy *touches*. Analogy, which probes and expresses the in-definable of the relationship between the distinct figures, comes to the necessity of thinking about the im-mediate singularity of every thing, which is impossible to express – and therefore comes to the ‘relationship’ between the in-definable forms of the *possible* representations of the thing and the *impossible* expression of its singularity⁶³. Thus, analogy makes us come into contact with reality, not *through* our concepts, but *violating them* continuously, making them waver. The analogical opening reminds us that experience can violate our usual ways of elaborating it, cracking and reshaping our categories. Analogy constantly re-presents that interruption that awakens from our ephemeral lives and makes us understand that there is something to be seen and that we are already looking at it. And I believe that this is a form of realism, because the radical otherness of what we experience clearly demonstrates the independence of reality, which continually reshapes our ways of thinking and experiencing and, ultimately, our consciousness⁶⁴.

In conclusion, I believe that only a radically analogical philosophy allows us to overcome the distinction between the two dominant styles of thought in contemporary philosophy, which are summarized by the labels of ‘continental’ and ‘analytic’. And, in so doing, it opens up a perspective of the world that is forever closed to those who have the blinders of orthodoxy. Analogy allows us, in fact, a way of talking about a

⁵⁹ Priest, *One*, 20.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁶¹ Ibid., 14.

⁶² Ibid., 15.

⁶³ Cacciari, *Della cosa ultima*, 505.

⁶⁴ See the beautiful book by Noah Roderick, *The Being of Analogy*, in which it is contended that analogy is at the very heart of cognition and communication, and it is through analogy that we can begin dismantling the impossible wall between knowing and being.

thing almost without talking about it, that is, alluding to it as “something that might be real, but which cannot become fully present. And that is why philosophy is *philosophia*: love of wisdom rather than wisdom itself. The Philosophy of Access wants philosophy to be a wisdom about thought, when really it is a *love* of wisdom about that which lies *beyond* thought”⁶⁵.

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⁶⁵ Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, Section 4.I would like to thank two anonymous referees for their thoughtful comments that helped me clarify several details and aspects of the paper.