

Dialogo Ergo Sum

From a Reflexive Ontology to a Relational Ontology

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge is a dialogue with the world, in countless ways: art, technology, cataloguing, exploration are ultimately forms of dialogue. We learn through dreams, hallucinations, alterations of consciousness, rational focusing, motivational conjugation or emotional marking, immersion in our Umwelt or denial thereof by means of technopoiesis. Each dialogue brings us a true picture, not an appearance enslaved to a sensory illusion or to becoming: the resulting image is as true as that which is hidden to show itself to a different dialogical scan. This papers aims to show how culture is a relational outcome. In this sense, it is necessary to embrace a posthumanistic approach. The humanistic assumption that founds the human "juxta propria principia" – according to its own principles – must be revised. It is undeniable that this awareness will inspire new poetics and new experiences without claiming to create them from scratch. Just as the infinite was before us even prior to the Copernican revolution, so hybridization has always been part of the human experience and is not the outcome of infiltrative technologies.

Keywords: posthumanism, technopoiesis, culture, relational ontology, dialogical epistemology, Darwin, Umwelt, welt, anthro-poiesis, otherness.

1. PREMISE

Just as the wings of an albatross tell us of thermal and air flows, and just as the shape of a dolphin reflects the gradients of viscosity of the water, so the gills of a fish allow a liquid world to brush against them, and the size of an insect speaks of the levels of oxygen in the atmosphere. Walking through the spaces of the world means encountering symphonies of biomechanical relationships, where the open, heteronomous configurations implicitly need supplemental information in order to exist.

We are children of recursive and iterative relationships that geometrically recur in our flesh: muscle fibres are matched with nerve bundles, and

immune flows are called to neuromodulate through cytokines, because knowledge always travels on multiple tracks. Phylogenesis is a long thread of relations, where every adaptation, competition, confrontation, or symbiosis is inscribed in the body, like moraines drawn by glaciers. In both the articulation of one's bodily equipment and cognitive exercise, one's phylogenesis is simultaneously a book to read, a storyteller, and a diary recording a billion-year-old journey. This sort of "somatic geology" is made of layers that represent the different eras of adaptive dialogues: in other words, our existential architectures bear the mark of the inventions of our ancestors. Everything is summed up in this strange ontogenesis, stratified – like a novel – into constitutively different chapters, to resume a dialectics that includes otherness. Suddenly, I seem to understand an enigmatic and amnesic beginning.

Human beings are thus a Gordian knot of relational stories, insoluble and inextricable, intertwining time in a dialectical assimilation: what-I-am speaks of my relations, which are folded like diachronic origami in a protein structure. Each ontopoietic event already refers to an Other: it is always heteroreferred. It does not imply a passive intake of the shape imposed by the world, but a morphopoietic emergence that emerges from a dialogue. My body is a theatre of representations that have preceded me, identified me and finally given themselves as kind offerings for those to come. The problem of identity comes back *à la* Proust, like a rushing stream that overflows in the relationship between our memory and the alchemy of the world. I find the certainty of my existence in the fact that I *precede* this occasional presence – this happens the very moment when I am questioning myself.

So why do we claim that identity can be translated as "purity"? Why do we seek its essence, as if we were wrapped in a sclerotic husk that keeps us safe from dangerous contaminations, while avoiding complex, inevitable rootings? A process of identity formation that, like a motor, grinds predicates through dialectical acrobatics – in Giorgio Agamben's anthropological machine (2004) or Ugo Fabietti's emergence of cultures (2013) – belies the Heraclitean opposition: identity assimilates, it does not reject. Each dialogue serves to introject, or organize dialogue based on the interlocutor. The speed of the cheetah is the result of the dialogic confrontation with the gazelle; the shape of an orchid mirrors the bumblebee's fury; the webbed feet of waterfowl speak of a long conversation with water.

What we call adaptation should be defined, perhaps more properly, by the term "correlation", which is the reflection of the partner in a dialogue. The genealogical interpretation, the famous "inheritance with modification" of the Darwinian tradition, allows us to understand taxonomies, to

find infinite links with lives preceding us, to recognize qualities in us that have not been developed by our species. Consider how our body summarizes the past in order to make us witnesses of the spectacle of the world. It is something extraordinary, like the migration of neurons along the layers of the cortex, following routes that recall avian pathways, or the bio-clocks that regulate apoptotic processes that form shapes and voids out of embryonic forms. On whichever dimension of the *bios* we focus our attention – whether on the complex life of a cell, an embryological rhythm, the social behaviour of the Hymenoptera, or the articulated dependencies of an ecosystem – we always find long strings of information sedimented in time.

We consult sorcerers and fortune-tellers about the future, but most of our ignorance concerns the past. Figuratively spreading its arms, the past covers the space between the distal end of the left hand and the right, while the future is just a speck of dust on our fingernails. The past is a history of dialogues that concern us and that have much to tell us about what we feel, and the choices that we will make. As my hand types, a movement made possible by neural organizations set by its past on the chopper, and it resembles a tree-branch, in the same way that the body of a gastropod, albeit unconsciously, molds to the golden section of its shell. Ontology should be a kind of relational archaeology, attentive to the fossils and the qualities that our lineage has incorporated, giving shape to those features that stand out in our family heritage. We are fortuitous outcomes of relations as remote as an echo that reverberates in this present – a cosmic big bang that we still find hard to understand.

2. ARIADNE'S THREAD OF EPISTEME

Knowledge is a dialogue with the world, in countless ways: art, technology, cataloguing, exploration are ultimately forms of dialogue. We learn through dreams, hallucinations, alterations of consciousness, rational focusing, motivational conjugation or emotional marking, immersion in our Umwelt or denial thereof by means of technopoiesis. Each dialogue brings us a true picture, not an appearance enslaved to a sensory illusion or to becoming: the resulting image is as true as that which is hidden to show itself to a different dialogical scan. This is because there is no Ariadne's thread that leads to Being. It simply "does not exist": this statement is very different from the denial of its ownership or of the possibility to own it. In other words it is not epistemic deficiency but the absence of a final form of the world. And that does not mean annihilating reality, but enhancing it in virtuality.

We strive in a frantic search for meaning, in the desire for a descriptive look able to embrace micro and macrochaos, in the illusion of an explanatory power that, like a hawk, can seize the ultimate or fundamental causes of things at a long distance. And we think that everything can then relax on one single level – reality served on the dinner table for our meal. But perhaps Speusippus as reported by Aristotle (Berti 2010) was right in his day-dreaming about plans that are actually incommensurable with each other. That would mean the existence of a mocking reality, without instructions and without forms, virtual in defining the spaces of possibility, revealable (i.e. resistant) for what it is-not – only when it refuses to indulge in our dialogical level and ultimately says “no”. For the rest “it is as it lets itself be organized”, so that the episteme is a dialogue. On the other hand, what a paradox to affirm reality based on its resistance, namely, its stating what it is not!

Certainly if reality is a space of possibility, there are infinite ways to describe and explain it, as many as the potential dialogues with it. And then, as a consequence, every level of reality would be true. Despite the *Apeiron* and physicalism, reality is only manifested in dialogue. Changing dialogue, a different level of reality appears to us: not invented, but phenotypically organized. However, if epistemology recalls an act of command – organizing a form, that is, a phenotypic level of reality, through a special dialogue – this should not lead to a green light to the monstrous Demiurge that tempts us to be arrogant. On the contrary, it means becoming aware of the error that lies in the solipsistic pretence of an observing subject and an object that is observed. Moving towards a dialogical epistemology means considering all forms of knowledge as a reciprocative act, in the knowledge of deploying in dialogue one of the many possible images of the multi-verse. Having a relational concept involves many conceptual reinterpretations of aspects that have been taken for granted by humanist anthropocentrism.

Unknown relations intertwine our lives, sometimes making a mockery of our epistemological efforts, giving themselves accidentally in serendipity or, instead, hiding in the folds of our gaze. We must learn to accept that dialogue is above all the ability to listen, the willingness to be surprised. Nature loves to build its copulae in chthonic recesses. That is why wonder is the main tone of philosophizing. Lamarck gave start to evolutionism thinking that the species do not arise and do not become extinct: he could have never imagined that the debate he had given rise to would have produced, in 1859, an essay on the origin of the species (Darwin [1859] 2003). He was right in what he had not guessed. Occult links chase each other in the notebook of *physis*: it is not so easy to think that a molecule endowed with antibiosis can be found by searching for a colorant. These relations are like

dots that combine into constellations, kaleidoscopic gestalts that can bring out ordered structures from the ocean of virtuality – and yet such structures are based on previous relationships, on a way to impose order on reality.

But if episteme is a dialogue with virtuality, a level of reality is not an invention, but a possible organization: this piece of furniture is real in its atomic prospectus and in the organic one, in its subsuming a time of photosynthesis and a stream of solar radiation and in being the expression of a botanic existence, in its instrumental meaning and in the model that inspired the late Nineteenth century craftsman who realized it. What we discover in episteme is the kind of relationship that we are establishing with the real. However, care must be taken: the dialogue does not resemble an autopsy of reality – it has no a rudder, eludes our expectations, mocks our castles in the air and brings out different ones. This pretence of control, which makes epistemology a practice and exercise of dominion, is another one of the humanist illusions. One must surrender to relations; epistemic trails are elusive like soap bubbles.

A dialogical epistemology puts the relationship at the centre of the learning process by not considering the founding act as an event of eradication of the human being from the world. It is ultimately a matter of reading the ex-stasis not as transcendence from the world but as transcendence in the world. To know is to accept to agree with the itinerary with otherness, being also able to choose one of the infinite coordinates in topographic virtuality. It means to accept ignorance as the starting point of any process of knowledge, which does not separate, but rather combines with irony. There are endless dialogues on minimum systems, chasing each other silently; sometimes they bewilder us, sometimes we cannot even perceive them.

Lost in a narcissistic cogito, we face our existence as if it were a reflective continuum. But is it really so? We find it hard to think of ourselves as in-relation-to, particles dispersed in the other, being alternatively (and at the same time) hearths of Hestia and hermetic travellers. Taken by an ideological individualism – no longer a childish egocentric temptation – we become voracious consumers of otherness (humans as “intestines of the world”), but also desperately alone recesses in the desert of the universe. Indeed, if the Copernican decentralization is not accompanied by an abdication from humanist absolutism, we are inevitably doomed to cosmic pessimism, abandoned in the arms of Schopenhauer. Shipwreck then is never sweet – it may only appear such for an ephemeral endorphinous effect, as a legacy of the vertigo of the sublime on subcortical systems. The charm of humanism lies in its ability to take our childishness and to give it a cultural basis, transforming every rejection into a test, building complex tautologies, and resorting to the *petitio principii*. If only we assumed a relational

perspective we would have immediate ontological comfort, but we would also drastically change our epistemological gyroscope and the catalogue of our values, as to both aims and obligations.

As long as we stick to the individualist conception, in need of constantly affirming a centre and drawing a Gestalt autonomy around it – an essence that is capable of mortifying the rest in the afterlife of the object – we will never fully understand the paths of knowledge, nor the reasons why we should avoid considering the world as a huge banquet laid for us. Anthropocentrism is a way to build an egocentric complicity. As with epicycles, everything seems to add up and casting out nines apparently supports the calculation, but it is all an artefact. We are used to thinking that even *techne* is a solipsistic and self-sufficient act – when, on the contrary, it is what most of all realizes itself and feeds on relations. We are supported in the belief that technology is designed to produce self-sufficiency, while it causes increased conjugation and dependence. In this scenario, we can hardly question individualistic myth-making.

We castle whenever the nightmare seems to vanish. Loneliness is an evil that we carry with us from an indefinable cultural nebula; paradoxically, we defend it as a parasite on which we have an addiction. Perhaps it is so: the fear of death demeans life; the need for transcendence loosens our radical nodes and condemns us to a black exile within ourselves. The instrument then becomes the way to take leave of the world, to invent a myth of purity – the idea that, like a glove, separates us from the burden, detaching us from fruition and giving us the thing in-itself. The open, whether we follow Rilke's sweetness ([1923] 1961) or Heidegger's arrogance ([1983] 1995), is the most infamous of scams, both when it speaks of the human and when it gives itself to the non-human.

A relational being can only produce relational modes, whether in the unconscious roots of its wishes or in multiple intentional degrees, whether it realizes them transforming the body into an operational parade ground or hugely multiplying the technological interfaces. We can deny them, perjure our ontological independence, fake a detached self-sufficiency, but we can never help affirming them in every act, in any dimension of existence. Our principle of individuation is a relational level, a dialogue of maturation started already in the dark cloister of gestation and then continued in the first years of life – a gradual emergence from the *millefeuille* of phylogenetic affiliations. And sure enough we seem to sprout from the formless fog, already beautifully dressed as by magic, but it is the usual illusion of retrospectives and *a posteriori* justifications. Infinite notes and counterpoints were aligned in the warp through continuous additions of information from the outside, for glimmers of consciousness to finally emerge.

3. TOWARDS A RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY

Life is primarily a relational system, an open window on the universe through time that has allowed for an internal order through the unusual gift of transforming solar energy into information. Huge thermonuclear storms have accumulated grains of architectural and metabolic geometries tested in the atelier of existence over the course of a nearly four-billion-year odyssey. As Erwin Schrödinger (1992) noted with his concept of “negentropy” and Ilya Prigogine (Kondepudi and Prigogine 1998) with that of “dissipative structures”, autopoiesis was never autarky. The leaves of an oak reflect the patterns of light in the world that surrounds it, and its roots follow invisible aquifers and mineral pastures while struggling with a crowd of competitors. The foliage of a tree is the most striking example of evolutionary mirroring: the growing bud’s access to photosynthesis is also a reward in auxin, an incentive for development.

Life does not just waste energy in this selfish stagnation, in keeping itself in a thermodynamically unstable condition: life is expansion, access to new horizons of relationship. On the other hand, every living being not only needs a continuous supply of energy from the outside, but must also dispel the genetic and epigenetic information that phylogeny has accumulated in it. The greatest miracle is always the unraveling of the patented amino tape – a code full of loopholes that relies on external dialectics to be fulfilled. Once again, we are talking about relations. Every new life that is born from the mystery of birth has already a trans-specific experience so rich that the library of Alexandria pales by comparison. In this respect we can speak of a recapitulation that is not only embryogenic but also existential, which means that every living thing sums up the history of its genetic line, exploiting the information capitalized over time.

When Konrad Lorenz (1973) says that *a priori* elements are nothing more than phylogenetic *a posteriori* ones, he is telling us something that our mind’s essentialist frenzy does not always grasp. The rather obvious suggestion is to stop trying to find an ancestral common ground with animals, but rather to look for kinship at the very heart of our identity. In this sense, contrary to what suggested Thomas Nagel (1974), although we are incapable of echolocation, we are also bats. In our mammalian hearts, we still roam the Jurassic nights; like confused reptiles in the new earthly dimension we seek a nest and an amnion able to give us back the comfort of water.

Jakob von Uexküll’s *Umwelten* (1957) are not separate monads, but worlds with significant areas of overlap. And these legacies do not rest in the depths of our unconscious, do not disturb our humanity in danger-

ous, feral ways. Rather, they represent the driving force of the emotions and motivations that we recognize as the most authentic expression of our existence. Human bipedalism reflects tetrapod rhythms and choreographies, which cannot stop the tuning of the front legs, and the responsive train of our fears – designed for freezing, alarm pheromones, faeces – still recalls the response of reptilian proto-mammals. As vestigial legacies, these features that evolved from nonhuman relations with the world represent the strength of our identity. So our nonhuman legacy is not a mere appendix; it represents what we are.

Ninety-nine per cent of our predicates are the result of nonhuman relations. Love for our offspring, our collaborative skills and empathic propensities, prosocial competences, the different levels of affection, our tendency to collect and make catalogues, our arts of mimicry and creativity, our communicative disposition and our use of arbitrary signs in representation: these are all things that were left to us by nonhuman creatures in their diachronic path of relation with the world. These dialogues preceded us, because each of us is the result of a “genealogical thread?”, that started in the mists of the Precambrian and never stopped. The smallest interruption of the wire, a small delay between the billions of passengers who took the bus of existence, and we would not be here.

The river of time has carved the rock, drawing shapes through relationships and tracing “geometries of relations”. You cannot understand the unstable magma of *bios* hollowing out the individual living being from the network of conjugations. Echoing Gregory Bateson (1979), one should look at the “structures which connect” because it is there that meaning resides. In the thinnest outline of a relationship – a threshold more than a border – life breathes. Its dispositions are nothing but conjugating operators: animal subjectivity is not rationality but desire, the true archetype of every intentionality. Desires are relational verbs. Be it a predator chasing, or a frugivore collecting, desires are predicative provisions that lack meaning unless they have external references. Like ellipses, desires expect the rest of the world to specify/individuate them.

Ecology has shown the intimate interdependence of bodies, outlining trophic chains and reciprocal mutualisms, and today one hardly questions the systemic repercussions caused by any disruption anywhere along the supply chain. However, what is often misunderstood is the complexity of the relationship maintained in the river of life: its strength is also its vulnerability. Homeostatic systems are joined by autocatalytic systems, divided only by a small gradient whose effects are nevertheless catastrophic, because under-threshold the system dampens disturbances, while over-threshold it emphasises them. This has already been detected in the ice ages: up to a

certain threshold irradiation is kept in check, but when the ice expands it increases the reflection of the light expanding the domain of glaciers. A very similar situation relates to the carbon cycle, although the effects are the opposite. Up to a certain threshold there is a homeostatic system for capturing the carbon from the calcium carbonates of many microorganisms and from the cellulose of plants, but beyond that threshold, with the increase of temperature for the greenhouse effect, the action of capture stops and further carbon is freed by combustion and degradation. Unfortunately, we completely lack the ability to preview the cumulative effects of changes in the homeostatic systems of Gaia, to refer to James Lovelock's image (1987), and perhaps that's why we continue undeterred in our action of perturbation.

4. CULTURE AS A RELATIONAL OUTCOME

Among the changes wrought by a relational ontology, first of all there is the poetic act, traditionally handed down as a self-sufficient achievement by a bilious Prometheus. On the contrary, there is no invention that was not discovered, no culture that is not representation, and no creation that is not the result of dialogue. The stereotype of the inventor that is abstracted from the world, entirely closed-off in his Pindaric access to the unreachable realms of Platonic ideas, is once again the result of a non-relational vision of our being. Culture, in hindsight, does not emanate from the Plotinian One, but is the result of our copulative creativity: a mimesis that leads us away from the phylogenetic centre of gravity and produces "attraction of worlds". If this is what Martin Heidegger ([1983] 1995) meant by his principle of the creative power of the human, who could disagree?

The mistake is to consider this creation as a solipsistic moment that brings out the ontopoietic predicate *ex nihilo*. The mistake, in other words, is the humanistic misreading of the human dimension as autarchic. My research in the zooanthropological field led me to read the emergence of culture as a predicative process resulting from an animal epiphany, that is, a dialogic event that decenters the human being and identifies a new hybrid condition. This epiphany is intended as a time when the human being, in connection with otherness, goes beyond the phenomenon (the animal as other-*than*-oneself), accessing an epiphanic event (the animal as other-*with*-oneself) and finding a new existential dimension. Before showing us "how to fly" – that is, techniques of flight – birds have shown us that "one

can fly”, ushering us into a further declination of presence in the here-and-now. On the other hand, to achieve this epiphany the human being must go beyond the phenomenon, being projected and hybridized with the bird’s body.

For zooanthropology (Marchesini and Tonutti 2007; Marchesini 2014), the archetypes of human culture – namely the areas of dance, music, cosmetics, fashion, technopoiesis, rituals, just to name a few – are not emanative outcomes of human genius, but epiphanic results of the relation with heterospecific beings. Traditions followed autonomous paths – in fact, once in possession of the harmonies and phrasings of finches, human music can be born – but this archetypal emergence is a hybrid product. As I suggested, the first cry of culture is a process based on the epiphany of “animal-becoming” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Abram 2010). Taking on the existential guise of a heterospecific being, the human being is projected in an ex-centric position with respect to his or her phylogenetic legacy. It is a case of anthropo-decentration.

But beware: this becoming-animal does not correspond to the image of ancestral regression suggested by late-nineteenth-century literature or by Cesare Lombroso’s physiognomy. Becoming-animal in zooanthropology, in fact, is opposite to the narrative *topoi* that substantiate the nature of the various characters *à la* Kurtz or Mr. Hyde. This is an ongoing and non-regressive process. Also, it must not be mistaken for an act of mere imitation! Epiphany rather reminds one of a projection into animal otherness, or an act of possession, so that the resulting morphological *pastiche* recalls a performance rather than a simple mimetic translation. The dialogical meaning of this predicative dimensioning thus becomes clear, since the human condition is usually figured as elevation and disjunction.

Therefore, culture is not an autarkic product, and it does not take human beings away from the creative-relational magma of *bios*. On the contrary, it is the result of the propensity of our taxon to build inclusive relationships with otherness. This means that the cultural act does not negate human nature but rather realizes it, albeit in a hybridized way (and not through a simple translation, as the sociobiological tradition would have it). Culture also produces a more heated conjugation with heterospecific beings, doubling the connective links. According to this perspective, what ties us to the other species are only shared phylogenetic traits, along the three traditional vectors: (a) biological universals, due to the physical and chemical laws of the planet; (b) homologies or similarities due to common kinship; (c) analogies or similarities due to adaptive convergence – but also cultural ones, resulting from the becoming-animal foundation of the human condition.

Otherness understood as epiphany, and not simply as a phenomenal counterpart, thus shows us the impossibility of understanding the human by singling it out from its relationship with the nonhuman. Beside the predicates attributable to the common condition of being animals, we are also linked to other species by our hybrid predicates, now deeply included in the human condition. When Francesco Remotti (2002) speaks of “anthropo-poiesis”, he underlines a dimensioning that is not exclusively ontogenetic, but takes on the centrifugal tones already noted by Helmuth Plessner (1977). On the other hand, this being off-center, this excess – which does not allow one to explain the predicates of humanity by direct descent from the phylogenetic content – admits an external contribution. It is a dialogue, indeed, and one that is open to the introjection of nonhuman content – which relates that heterospecific beings have a foundational co-factoriality not only due to their natural heritage but also because they participate in the cultural *cosmopolis*.

In this sense, it is necessary to embrace a posthumanistic approach. The humanistic assumption that founds the human *juxta propria principia* – according to its own principles – must be revised. It is undeniable that this awareness will inspire new poetics and new experiences of the sublime without claiming to create them from scratch. Just as the infinite was before us even prior to the Copernican revolution, so hybridization has always been part of the human experience and is not the outcome of infiltrative technologies. We have always been hybrids, even before our ancestors re-negotiated the human morphopoietic threshold by chipping flint and reshaping the architecture of the skull.

On the contrary, disjunctive logic claims to build identity by opposition, denying any shared. But once we acknowledge the end of humanism, we see that *Dasein* is not a distancing from the world: it is a phenomenological common nature. Having a relational view inevitably means not giving up sovereignty but rather admitting that it has always been an illusion. We sail across the world carelessly, without a fixed goal, in blissful ignorance. Coming down from the anthropocentric pedestal means having greater awareness of the dynamics that affect us. We can argue that the anthropocentric view, stubbornly blind to relational processes, is now the most serious threat to the human being, the “black hole” of the planet. Accepting our relational condition, on the other hand, does not mean simply increasing our awareness, but rather freeing our ability to truly live, giving up our mania for control.

5. RELATION AS THE MOVER OF INDIVIDUAL CREATIVITY

We are born hungry. Observing the first two years of life of a child is the most productive gnoseological operation of all. The dialogue with the mother is silent and endless, like the chain of ants along the pheromonal highway leading to the anthill, a kind of trophallaxis of looks and haptic conjugations. She is a safe shelter that, like the wind on the sail, pushed the child into the open sea of the world, so that even the most private experience becomes relational. We can call it care, investment, epimelesis, attachment ... or more poetically we can warm up our hearts with the word "love".

Starting from Hinde (1970) and Bowlby's first intuitions (1969), today we know that our mind is a relational product. The safe shelter is not only centrifugal fuel, but also a compass/rudder in the experiential path, able to guide our familiarization with the world and operate specific evolutionary differentials. It is a real "wind rose" that translates certainties and fears, guidelines and disinterests, which she earned through her relational existence and then translated in the ontogenetic identity of her child. When choosing the rooms in which to turn on the light, based on her dispositions and memories, she orientates the child's centrifugation and marks the content of his experiences.

She is not just a safe shelter, but a guiding light and a projection, a map to reproduce maternal identity through acts of individual experience. How many acts guide ontopoiesis? It is hard to say, but surely they are many more than most disciplines are willing to admit (ethology with the notion of social learning, psychology with that of attachment, and anthropology with the coordinates of cultural tradition). Mammals pair learning and parental care, so everything is traced back to the etymology of the student as the one who is fed. In the relational canon, even Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978) can finally shake hands: since no dialogue with oneself is ever a dialogue, any epistemological enlargement is a zone of proximal growth.

We do not only share genes or epigenetic information: in a symposium that starts as parental and becomes social, we climb up an endless staircase of dialogues before we reach the view of our identity, and then convince ourselves that we have always been there, at the top, enjoying the spectacle of our consciousness. The problem is that this mistake has turned into an actual doctrine with Descartes, and this condemns us to being-for-death. Reflective excess powers a narcissistic narcosis that, in addition to turning us into a pathology for the entire planet, has made us the sacrificial victims. Inevitably, led astray by this doctrine of denial, we are left with Sartre's nausea (1965) for the daily invasion of a world that is constitutionally inca-

pable of just being there in front of us. We are fighting against our own copulative nature and disgust is not being-in-world but rather this unremitting struggle to say goodbye. Ultimately, everything would be easier if we finally accepted that we are not alone.

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