



Further Questions

A Way Out of the Present Philosophical Situation
(via Foucault)

Leonard Lawlor

Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy - Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française, Vol XIX, No 1 (2011) pp 91-105

Vol XIX, No 1 (2011)

ISSN 1936-6280 (print)

ISSN 2155-1162 (online)

DOI 10.5195/jffp.2011.481

<http://www.jffp.org>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.



This journal is operated by the University Library System of the University of Pittsburgh as part of its D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program, and is co-sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh Press

Further Questions

A Way Out of the Present Philosophical Situation

(via Foucault)

Leonard Lawlor

Pennsylvania State University

Let us begin by assembling some signs of the present philosophical situation. On the one hand, the most important living French philosopher, Alain Badiou, calls for a “return to Plato,” despite the movement of anti-Platonism that dominated French and German thought in the 20th century.¹ On the other hand, the present moment sees a resurgence of naturalism in philosophy in general (including and especially Anglophone analytic philosophy), despite the criticisms of naturalism that have appeared throughout the 20th century. Phenomenology seems to be at the center of both of these movements. On the one hand, it is the idea of a mathematized ontology that requires the return to Plato, a mathematized ontology constructed without a reflection on its transcendental grounds. On the other, the resurgence of naturalism is so strong that a book could be imagined and published with the bastard name of *Naturalizing Phenomenology*, as if the transcendental moment of phenomenology did not transform the very meaning of nature.² These signs seem to indicate that we have entered into a phase of regression or even decline in philosophical thinking.³ If this interpretation of the signs is correct, if we have indeed entered into a phase of regression -- a twofold regression toward Platonism and toward naturalism -- we must ask the following question: is it possible for us to define something like a project or even a research agenda that would allow us to define a way of thinking that might *lead us out of* the present situation, a situation, it must be said, that seems dire for philosophy in general? If we can determine such a research agenda, perhaps we can also begin to understand what the tradition of “continental philosophy” has stood for.

The interrogation of what “continental philosophy” stands for allows us to approach the idea of *exiting* the present situation from a different perspective. When we reflect on the development of twentieth century continental philosophy, we see a dispersion of figures, themes, and ideas.

This dispersion accounts for the lack of success in the books so far written that aim to define “continental philosophy.”⁴ Yet, we must ask: is it possible to find a way of systematizing the dispersion? Perhaps a system can be formed, if we focus on some figures and ignore others, if we suppress some ideas and exaggerate others. Perhaps we can form a system if we focus only on Bergson, Freud, Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty (which means ignoring Adorno, Sartre, Levinas, and Gadamer, for example). Perhaps we focus only on these figures with an eye toward how they lead up to what I have called “the great French philosophy of the Sixties”: Derrida, Deleuze, and Foucault.⁵ Then perhaps we see a system. In fact, I think that we see four conceptual features for what we might call the project of “continental philosophy.” Here are the four conceptual features: (1) the starting point in immanence (where immanence is understood first as internal, subjective experience, but then, due to the universality of the *epoche*, immanence is understood as ungrounded experience⁶); (2) difference (where difference gives way to multiplicity, itself emancipated from an absolute origin and an absolute purpose); (3) thought (where thought is understood as language liberated from the constraints of logic, and language is understood solely in terms of its own being, as indefinite continuous variation); and (4) the overcoming of metaphysics (where metaphysics is understood as a mode of thinking based in presence, and overcoming is understood as the passage to a new mode of thought, a new people and a new land).

With the first conceptual feature – immanence – we see the irreducible role that phenomenology plays in this project. But, the other conceptual features indicate a conversion of phenomenology that results neither in Platonism nor in naturalism. Thanks to the phrase “the overcoming of metaphysics,” we see the central role that Heidegger plays in this conversion. It is Heidegger who shows, in 1929, that we can understand thought only when we suspend its object, when it is the thought of the nothing. It is Heidegger, in 1950, who shows that “language is language”; he shows that, grounded in nothing but itself, language opens out over an abyss, a void, an outside. It is Heidegger who inspires Foucault’s essay, “The Thought of the Outside.” Indeed, this essay will be my focus here.⁷ Published in 1966, at the high water mark of “the great French Philosophy of the Sixties,” “The Thought of the Outside” “deconstructs” subjective interior experience (the *cogito*) in order to transform it into the experience of the outside, in order to show its location within a multiplicity called the being of language. It seems to me that “The Thought of the Outside” leads us to an overcoming of metaphysics, due to the fact that it leads us to a new sort of experience. Our basic question becomes: what is the experience to which Foucault in “The Thought of the Outside” is leading us? If we are able to find ourselves within this new experience, perhaps we find as well a way out of the present philosophical situation. Of course, the idea of exiting from the present philosophical situation is nothing but a negative idea. If there is, however, positive content to the idea of exiting, it will be found only in the

form of conditions for questions, for “further questions,” hence the title of my essay. At the end of the essay we shall formulate these further questions for thinking.

Foucault’s “Thought of the Outside”

The Foucault essay is quite famous (since, among other reasons, Deleuze cites it frequently in his book on Foucault⁸). It concerns what Foucault calls modern literature, and the primary example he takes up is Maurice Blanchot’s writings. Along with his 1964 essay, “Madness, the Absence of Work,” “The Thought of the Outside” is one of Foucault’s main reflections on the being of language. The essay is important for us because it shows how to transform internal, subjective experience, the very idea of immanence, into a very different experience. Across the experience of the double, it goes to the experience of powerlessness. And from powerlessness, it goes to the experience of awaiting-forgetting, which is, of course, the experience of time. Before we turn to the experience of time, however, which will be taken up in the next section (in fact, what we shall take up there is an experience prior to the division of space and time), let us turn now to “The Thought of the Outside.”

The essay can be summarized in four points. First, “The Thought of the Outside,” as I just mentioned, amounts to a “deconstruction” of subjective, internal experience.⁹ Second, the deconstruction takes place by suspending the transitivity of speaking. Instead of saying “I am speaking about (or of) something,” I say, according to Foucault, “I speak” without any object.¹⁰ For Foucault, when I suspend the transitivity of speech, I find myself located within an indefinite or even an infinite supporting discourse, a discourse that becomes definite and limited only with the speaking of or about one thing. In that suspension, the “I” of the “I speak,” the “I,” that is, internal subjective experience is no longer a sovereign subject functioning as the origin of speaking; it becomes nothing more than a relay. So, third, as a relay to something other than itself, the experience of the inside becomes the experience of the outside. In “The Thought of the Outside,” Foucault calls the outside “an informal murmur,” that is, a multiplicity of pre-formal or non-formal linguistic traits.¹¹ In 1961, in *The History of Madness in the Classical Age*, Foucault calls this multiplicity the “murmur of dark insects”¹²; in 1969, in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, he calls it “the archive.” Then the fourth point: in “The Thought of the Outside,” Foucault determines the multiplicity as a kind of double of me. Here, Foucault refers to Blanchot’s writings about sirens in relation to Ulysses and about Eurydice in relation Orpheus.¹³ Foucault’s determination of the murmur as a double refers to the contemporaneous book, *The Order of Things*, in particular to Chapter Nine, “Man and his Doubles.”¹⁴ The double, however, in “The Thought of the Outside” is not the double of the same; it is an enigmatic presence that

draws me out of myself toward the outside. You can see, I hope, that with this “deconstruction” of the internal subjective experience, we have transformed the very idea of immanence, which is the first conceptual feature we laid out in the introduction to this essay.

Let us examine more closely the development of the “I speak,” as Foucault presents it in “The Thought of the Outside.” Foucault associates the “I speak” with the image of a fortress. The image comes about because the “I speak” suspends (in the sense of an *epoché*) both the content of the sentence and the supporting discourse of the sentence. It is the suspension of transitivity in general. Transitivity being suspended results in the sentence being entirely formal. The suspension of transitivity adds another detail to the image: now it looks as though a desert surrounds the fortress.¹⁵ What the image and the suspension indicate is an interiorization -- the “I speak” seems to stand all alone, independent, sovereign, like the Cartesian “I think” -- “unless” the desert, which Foucault calls a “void” (*vide*: also “emptiness”), is “an absolute opening.”¹⁶ The phrase “absolute opening” indicates two things. On the one hand, the phrase “absolute opening” indicates that the fortress is not closed off; the suspension of transitivity, that the sentence has no object, that nothing follows the “about” or the “of,” that the sentence does not say “I am speaking of,” opens the sentence, opens the thinking, to what is not interior. It opens the speaking to the outside. The outside for Foucault is language. Language, however, is neither a supporting discourse nor is it content; it is neither subject nor object. So, on the other hand, the phrase “absolute opening” indicates that the void itself is absolute. No longer is the foundation the Cartesian cogito, no longer is the foundation transcendental conditions of possible experience, no longer is the foundation man in his finitude; rather the foundation -- if we can call a void a foundation -- is language “in its raw being” expanding itself “to infinity.” In other words, by means of the suspension of transitivity, Foucault has transformed the immanence of interiority -- the “I” of the “I speak” -- into immanence of the outside. Immanence is now immanent to the outside which is nothing (or which is, to speak like Heidegger, the nothing) -- nothing but the flow of language. Foucault sets up therefore what Deleuze would call a plane of immanence: a movement to infinity that precedes the division into thought and matter.¹⁷

The establishment of a plane of immanence means that, with the outside, Foucault is involved in a project of the destruction, in a sort of “deconstruction,” as we have said, of metaphysics. The outside in Foucault is the outside of subjectivity, but that does not turn the outside into the foundation of positivity; the outside is neither subject nor substance. If we think of metaphysics in the somewhat infamous phrase that we have inherited from Derrida, “the metaphysics of presence,” then we must see that the outside in Foucault is an invisibility that “presences” without ever becoming visible. It is a stubborn invisibility. The outside is a “presence”

that is never manifest, that always dissimulates itself. Indeed, the formulas for the outside that Foucault composes indicate that it cannot be defined by simple presence that is readily available. As well, for Foucault, the outside is not a being, not an individual thing that is; the outside is being where the limit defines being. The outside is a limit extending itself to infinity, a universality, really a universalization that exceeds every singularity, while never attaining a positive form. The outside is a repetition that at the same time differentiates.¹⁸ Foucault calls it a “neutral space,” a “placeless place. It is a multiplicity.

What we are here calling a multiplicity refers to what Foucault calls “language in its raw being.” Language in its raw being means that Foucault, as Heidegger did in his 1950 “Language” essay, is not defining language by its customary concepts; it is not discourse, not representation; it is not defined by the function of communication (which would make it the speaking of man); it is not even literature in the sense of a self-referential discourse. To indicate the unusual status of language in Foucault, we must put the word between quotation marks. Foucault is conceiving “language” as a space of dispersion.¹⁹ Dispersion implies that “language” is not organized around a central meaning, that is either originary or teleological. As Foucault says, it is language getting as far away from itself as possible, getting away from itself in the sense of getting away from the customary senses of “language,” but also in the sense of getting away from pre-established meaning of words, phrases, and statements. “Language” hollows itself out from these already-given meanings. Its universalization exceeds anyone and any one statement of it. Exceeding any one statement of it, “language” is informal. Exceeding all individuality, “language” therefore is not spoken by someone. “Language” makes a network that is anonymous and informal. The network “language” forms – the outside -- is prior to the forms of subjectivity and to the forms of objectivity. Although Foucault calls this plane of the outside archeological, we could call it ultra-transcendental. The absence of no one and no meaning means that “language” has a kind of silence to it. But the silence is really, as we have already indicated, a murmur. This murmur calls, or better, attracts, like the sirens’ song and like Eurydice’s face.

Eurydice and the sirens are companions, doubles. The idea of the double refers to the experience of auto-affection, to the monologue of subjective, interior experience. Yet, the murmuring of the double transforms the experience of auto-affection into that of hetero-affection. When I think, when I engage in interior monologue, I experience something other than myself, I hear voices other than my own. Merleau-Ponty would say the same: the touching-touched relation never achieves unity; the left hand is never quite the same as the right hand; it remains other. Yet, Foucault adds something to this unclosable relation that we do not find in Merleau-Ponty. Foucault conceives the auto-affective relation as one of *violence* (and

therefore of power).²⁰ If there is something like a concept of the flesh in Foucault, the violence of the relation makes the concept different from that of Merleau-Ponty. In Foucault, the flesh contains the cry of death. The companion (who looks to be a double of me, as Eurydice and the sirens look to be doubles or reflections of Orpheus and Ulysses) is a power that “pushes back and away,” and therefore it is dangerous, a menace. One must keep it at a distance – the companion does not accompany -- since the companion might absorb and plunge one into “boundless confusion” and madness.²¹ The companion is not a person with an interiority; it is impersonal. Although the companion is not a privileged interlocutor – it is a mere “it” -- it is a demand to which one is never equal and a weight one would like to be free of. The companion is the imperative of a law that can never be obeyed. Thus even as the companion, the double, Eurydice and the sirens push back and away, they also, as Foucault says, attract.²²

Like the song of the sirens, the outside attracts and calls, and, when it attracts, it makes one undergo the presence of the outside. Undergoing the presence of the outside, one realizes that one is “irremediably” outside of the outside.²³ One is irremediably outside of the outside because the outside is “weak.” It is not a thing with which one can do something, it is not a statute that can be enforced or applied; it does nothing since it is nothing.²⁴ One is irremediably outside of the outside because the outside is not an inside to which one could find an entrance. The irremediable impossibility of gaining access to the outside brings us to the central characteristic of the experience we have been describing thanks to Foucault’s essay: the experience of powerlessness. Indeed, in “The Thought of the Outside,” Foucault suggests that the experience is even one of suffering.²⁵ One suffers because, as one advances towards the outside, it withdraws from the place to which one has advanced. Because the outside pushes back and away, because it eludes our grasp and withdraws, we who are attracted must, as Foucault says, be negligent. Negligence is the negation of any singular form. These singular forms (thoughts already thought, meanings already made, institutions already constructed) must be forgotten. As forgetfulness, negligence resembles the experience of dying: these singular forms must be destroyed if one is to try to reach the outside. But like Orpheus and Ulysses, the experience is not death. One must approach as closely as possible without entering into the danger of confusion and madness. Thus while forgetting, one must wait. On the other side of forgetting is awaiting. Here Foucault is again quite close to Heidegger. Waiting for Foucault must be a “pure waiting,” that is, it must be a waiting for nothing in particular, just as “profound boredom” in Heidegger is boredom with nothing in particular. Because one is waiting for nothing in particular, it is not certain that what comes is that for which one is really waiting. Thus, one must be attentive, even zealous, and multiply the efforts to wait for what is radically new or so old that it has never been seen before. Such an event, however, never happens as such. As soon as the event appears, it appears as someone, as

something, and then it is no longer an event of the outside; appearing as something or someone, the outside is no longer the outside. We must not expect the origin to return; we must wait for the promise to be fulfilled. Thus, as with Heidegger, Foucault suggests a kind of messianism without a messiah.

The experience to which Foucault is leading us is the experience of attraction-withdrawal. In the experience, one responds with awaiting-forgetting. Awaiting-forgetting is therefore a specific sort of thinking. In "The Thought of the Outside," Foucault (when he speaks of commentary in Blanchot) describes the thinking as one that welcomes the outside into its words; it lets them enter.²⁶ Thus, again like Heidegger, this thinking is based on a kind of attentive listening to a voice that is nearly mute. This voice is what Merleau-Ponty, quoting Valéry, has called "the voice of no one." As Foucault says, commentary, the kind of writing or speaking required for awaiting-forgetting, is nothing more than "the repetition of what the outside has never stopped murmuring."²⁷ The discourse therefore faithful to awaiting-forgetting engages in a kind of thinking that no longer interiorizes itself. What is required then is a thought of (the) nothing, of nothing formal or singular. Or, more precisely, what is required is a thought of a singularity that immediately unravels itself, that immediately makes itself continuous with other singularities. As we already noted, the thought of the outside is the thought of multiplicity. In order to think the outside, one must *not* say "I am thinking of my thoughts." What is required is not the "folding over," the "repli," of the "of." What is required is the unfold, the "depli," of "I am thinking...." In the openness of the unfold, one is thinking of or listening to or writing about the murmuring voices. In the thought of the outside therefore one finds oneself "enveloped in a nameless voice."²⁸

The Deconstruction of Auto-Affection and its Implications

Thanks to our investigation of Foucault's "The Thought of the Outside," we are able to see now that the research agenda for what we call "continental philosophy" can be summed up in one sentence. This kind of philosophy aims to construct a discourse that leads us to an experience that puts ourselves in question. In other words, it aims to invent concepts that lead us to an experience that transforms how we think of ourselves, that transforms who we are and what we do. The experience is the experience of powerlessness. Leading us to the transformative experience, we must *first* negate and destroy anything that might count as a simple, undifferentiated, pure, and static presence. That is, we must deconstruct anything that might count as an origin or an end, anything that might count as a foundation or ground, such as God, truth, the good, or nature. Anything that suggests the metaphysics of presence must be criticized and overcome. We must *then* affirm non-presence and groundlessness, which means that we must affirm

immanence. Our starting point then is no different from that of Descartes in the first two meditations: "I am thinking, I am thinking about..., I am thinking about my own ideas." The starting point therefore is auto-affection. Auto-affection is not a deliberate act of reflection through which an object called the self is given in a representation. Below reflection and as its origin is the basic experience of my own thoughts. As we know, since Plato's *Theaetetus*, thinking has been defined by means of an interior monologue (189e-190a): hearing oneself speak. The auto-affection called "hearing oneself speak" seems to include two aspects. On the one hand, I seem to hear myself speak *at the very moment* that I speak and *without* delay; and, on the other, I seem to hear *my own self* speak and *not* someone or something other. Let us now examine the particular experience of hearing oneself speak.

When I engage in interior monologue, when, in short, I think -- it *seems* as though I hear myself speak at the very moment I speak. It seems as though my interior voice is not required to pass outside of myself, as though it is not required to traverse any space, not even the space of my body. So, my interior monologue seems to be immediate, immediately present, and not to involve anyone else. Interior monologue seems therefore to be different from the experience of me speaking to another and different from the experience of me looking at myself in the mirror, where my vision has to pass through, at the least, the portals of my eyes. It is important to hear the "seems" in the preceding sentences. We are now going to *deconstruct* the appearances in order to expose the essential structure or process below what is apparent or believed. So, the problem with the belief that interior monologue (in a word, thought) is different from other experiences of auto-affection is twofold. On the one hand, the experience of hearing oneself speak is temporal (like all experience). The "timing" of interior monologue means that the present moment involves a past moment, which has elapsed and which has been retained. It is an irreducible or essential necessity that the present moment comes after, a little later; it is always involved in a process of mediation. The problem therefore with the belief that interior monologue happens immediately (as if there were no mediation involved) is that the hearing of myself is never immediately present in the moment when I speak; the hearing of myself in the present comes a moment later; there is a delay between the hearing and the speaking. This conclusion means that my interior monologue in fact resembles my experience of the mirror image in which my vision must traverse a distance that differentiates me into seer and seen. I cannot, it is impossible for me to hear myself immediately.

But there is a further implication. The distance or delay in time turns my speaking *in the present moment* into something coming second. Temporalization implies that the present is not an origin all alone; it is compounded with a past so that my speaking in the present moment is no longer *sui generis*. Therefore it must be seen as a kind of response to the past.

The fact that my speaking is a response to the past leads to the other problem with the belief that interior monologue is my own. Beside the irreducible delay and distance involved in the experience of auto-affection, there is the problem of the voice. In order to hear myself speak at this very moment, I must make use of the same phonemes as I use in communication (even if this monologue is not vocalized externally through my mouth). It is an irreducible or essential necessity that the silent words I form contain repeatable traits. This irreducible necessity means that, when I speak to myself, I speak with the sounds of others. In other words, it means that I find in myself other voices, which come from the past: the many voices are in me. I cannot – here we encounter the experience of powerlessness – it is impossible for me to hear myself speak all alone. There is a multivocality, a sort of murmur or clamor coming from the past. Others' voices contaminate the hearing of myself speaking.²⁹ Just as my present moment is never immediate, my interior monologue is never simply my own.

This description shows that auto-affection is based on a formal structure at work in the "timing," but also the, so to speak, "spacing" of auto-affection, a structure consisting of two contradictory elements. On the one hand, there is always a present moment, a kind of event, a point, a singularization. Each thought I have, as I speak it, has a kind of novelty to it, giving it a singular location. On the other, however, the singularity of the thought is connected back to some other thoughts in the past or in some other place. As the description shows, each thought is necessarily composed of traits already used in the past, traits standing nearby. Time temporalizes or endures and space spatializes or distances by means of two forces, the force of repetition and the force of singularization, the force of universality and the force of event. These two elements of repetition (or universality) and singularization (or event) are irreducibly connected to one another but without unification. In other words, these two forces are necessarily bound to one another and necessarily dis-unified.³⁰ The paradoxical relation of the two elements or forces implies that auto-affection is really, necessarily, hetero-affection. It implies that immanence dissolves into multiplicity; that the inside is in the outside (or the outside contaminates the inside); that, instead of an "I," there is a "we"; and that, instead of us thinking we have the power to hear ourselves speak (the very ground of autonomy), we find ourselves in an experience of inability. The necessity of these two forces is so strong that we are powerless not to obey their commands, even though their commands cannot be reconciled. We must singularize and we must universalize.

Let us be more precise about implications that follow from this deconstruction. *First*, experience as the experience of the present is never a simple experience of something present over and against me, right before my eyes in a clear intuition; there is always another force, another element, another agency there. Repetition contains what has passed away, distant,

and no longer present and what is about to come, from a distance, and is not yet present. The present therefore is always complicated by non-presence. Above, we called this minimal repeatability a trait; the trait refers to a kind of proto- and informal linguisticity that refers back to nothing but other traits. *Second*, if the experience of the present is always complicated, then nothing is ever given as such. Whatever is given is given as other than itself, as already past or as still to come. What becomes “foundational,” we might say is this “as.” Or what becomes “foundational” is the “of” of “the thought of ... nothing (present as such).” That is, what becomes foundation is a transitivity that, suspending its object, goes to infinity. *Third*, if the “foundation” is transitivity to infinity, then the proto-linguisticity of the trait is nothing but an informal (below the forms of meanings and propositions) murmur, a collectivity of voices. Instead, of a unified “I,” an “auto,” we find a “we” that remains incomplete and absent. *Fourth*, the fact that transitivity to infinity (the two forces of event and repetition) have become foundational, this fact has disturbed the traditional structure of transcendental philosophy, which consists in a linear relation between foundational conditions and founded experience. In traditional transcendental philosophy, an empirical event such as what is happening right now is supposed to be derivative from or founded upon conditions that are not empirical. Yet, the deconstruction shows that the empirical event is a non-separable part of the structural or foundational conditions. Or, in traditional transcendental philosophy, the empirical event is supposed to be an accident that overcomes an essential structure. But we see now that this accident cannot be removed or eliminated. *Fifth*, if the “accident” cannot be eliminated, if “accident” has always already taken place, then we cannot speak of an origin in the traditional sense, a principle (or *arche*), a unitary starting point, complete in itself, an unprecedented beginning. Instead, the origin is always origin-heterogeneous, that is, the origin is heterogeneous from the start or what starts is itself heterogeneous to the very idea of origin. Likewise, if the “accident” cannot be eliminated, if “accident” always remains, then we cannot speak of an end in the traditional sense, a purpose (or *telos*), a unitary stopping point, complete in itself, with nothing left over. Instead, the end is always end-heterogeneous, that is, the end is heterogeneous finally or what finishes is heterogeneous to the very idea of end. *Sixth*, if there is no original principle and if there is no final purpose, then every experience contains an aspect of lateness and an aspect of earliness. Every experience is the experience of awaiting-forgetting. It seems as though I am late for the origin since it seems already to have disappeared; it seems as though I am early for the end since it seems still to come. Every experience then is not quite on time or in the right place. Experience, the experience exposed only by deconstruction, is “out of joint.” Being “out of joint,” commanding in ways that are irreconcilable, the experience is one of powerlessness, but, more explicitly, it is one of violence and injustice.

Conclusion: Further Questions

It is precisely this “out of jointness” of the relation that raises *further questions*. Here is the most obvious and maybe the most pressing question. Is it necessary to conceive the relation of the two forces as one of violence? Is some other conception of the relation possible? It seems that we cannot conceive the relation strictly as peace or non-violence since the idea of peace, balance, equality, reconciliation, seems to imply a bringing to an end (or at least it implies the imagination of an end; this claim itself raises a question of whether we can indeed image an end in the strict sense). If peace means the end of experience, then reacting to the imbalance of the two forces with perfect peace seems to be the very worst sort of violence, complete violence, the end of everything. The question of the conception of the relation as violence leads to the question of reaction. Let us imagine -- maybe we can imagine nothing else -- that the relation between event and repetition remains forever unjust. The pain of loss in one’s heart always remains; we continue to suffer the anxiety, with neither protection nor reserve, almost to the point of madness, that the injustice is irremediable. Then, we must ask, how do we react to this necessary violence, this irreducible pain, this insane anxiety? As we just realized, it seems that we cannot react with perfect and complete peace. We must become something other than the reaction of the worst violence. Therefore, the question: is there then some other reaction hiding behind the “non” of non-violence? Is there some other power hiding behind the absence of power? Perhaps there is, and it amount to this: if we cannot stop the violence of repetition on the event, we can let it happen; if we cannot stop the violence of the event on repetition, we can let it happen. This letting happen means that we have the ability – the power, maybe – to be unable. We are able to obey the law of repetition (we must always await the repetition in each event, obligated thereby to forget each event); we are able to obey the law of singularization (we must always forget all the repetitions of events, obligated thereby to wait for another event). Is this obedience itself listening to the murmur of the outside? Is this obedience a welcoming of all the events across the border that divides while binding, welcoming all repetitions across the threshold that binds while dividing? Maybe this obedience would do the least violence. Nothing is certain, however.

In this reaction of the least violence, we have opened the border of who we are to others, to all the others that haunt us from the past (they keeps coming back to us) and to all the others that wait for us in the future (they keep coming toward us). How are we to conceive this “we”? Even if we could do the very least violence, there would still be other events violated by repetition, there would still be other repetitions violated by the event. Because of this irremediable violence – but must it be irremediable? – this “we” cannot be unified and identical. A unified and identical “we,” a community at peace with itself, can never, therefore, be accomplished. The

people are lacking. They are therefore, always, still a people, a “demos,” to come. How are we to conceive this “we”? Minimally, we would recognize this people to come by the very fact that they question themselves. In this self-interrogation, the people to come would always become other than they are, going over border and limits or opening borders and limits. Will the people to come, therefore, include everyone, the whole world, and therefore the foreign, the migrating, the vagrant, the homeless, and even the beastly – in a word, will the people to come include the enemies? How can there be something like a society of friends that includes the enemies? And if we can imagine such a hyperbolic society of “friends” (including the whole world), of what are they friends? We cannot imagine any society that does not dwell on a land. There can be no people, no nation, no democracy without a land. They must have a place to dwell and be enveloped. Just as the people are always to come, the land, soil, the earth, is still to come. There is always more depth, more distance, more dimensions, to infinity. How are we to imagine this earth to come? Is it *terra firma* or is the soil shifting beneath our feet? Is it a utopia or a dystopia, a heterotopia? What is its element? Is it a desert or an ocean? Is the land an ark floating on the water or a fortress sitting on the sand? Is it a countryside or a city? Is it a terrain of pastures or mountains? Is it a finely segmented city or a city of porous walls? Does it have a name? Do the people who might dwell on this land have a name? If they have a name, can we call them forth? How? Can we imagine an artform, a literature, a letter, that addresses them? Can we invent concepts, create beliefs, a name that will make these dispersed living beings come together?

There are no clear answers to these questions of violence, of a people to come, and a land to come. Yet, if we have been exposed to the experience of powerlessness, we sense that these questions have force. Like a law, they command us to think. Indeed, these questions have been formulated with the hope that they will bring about a renewal of thinking. Such a renewal is the very project of what we have been calling “continental philosophy.” Perhaps, these questions lead us “beyond continental philosophy.” Perhaps the attempts to answer them constitute something like “post-continental philosophy.” Whatever we call the next step in thinking, however, does not matter, as long as we remember the potentiality of these conceptual elements: (1) the starting point in immanence (where immanence is understood first as auto-affection, but then, when its appearances are deconstructed, it becomes the powerlessness of hetero-affection); (2) difference (where the relation in hetero-affection is conceived as violence between the forces of repetition and the forces of singularization); (3) thought (where the language in which we think is understood as an threatening murmur); and (4) the overcoming of metaphysics (where metaphysics is understood as a mode of thinking that reacts to the murmur with the worst violence, and overcoming is understood as the creation of a new mode of thinking, imagining, and inventing that calls forth a people to

come, friends of the least violence, dwelling in a land to come). If we do not forget the potentiality of these elements, if we hold to a remembering that obliges us to forget the forms of them, then perhaps these elements have the power to lead us out of the present philosophical situation.

¹ Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), 15-23 and 141-147; English translation by Oliver Feltham as *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2005), 4-15 and 123-129. On these pages, Badiou discusses the relation of mathematics to poetry, and therefore, to Heidegger.

² Jean Petitot, Francisco J. Varela, Bernard Pachoud, Jean-Michel Roy, *Naturalizing Phenomenology: Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). For a discussion of the issues involved in the introduction to this collection, see my "Becoming and Auto-Affection (Part II): Who are We?" in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, volume 30, number 2 (2010): 219-237.

³ In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari say that "Is not [Badiou's thought], in the guise of the multiple a return to an old conception of philosophy as superior philosophy?" See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1991), 144; English translation by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell as *What is Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 152.

⁴ See above all, Simon Critchley, *Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Simon Glendinning, *The Idea of Continental Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006). More successful books are: Andrew Cutrofello, *Continental Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2005); and Lee Braver, *A Thing of this World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

⁵ Leonard Lawlor, *Thinking through French Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

⁶ De Waehlens says that all modern philosophy begins with the cogito understood as "the experience of the conscious subject." See Alphonse de Waehlens, "Les equivoques du Cogito," in *La philosophie et les expériences naturelles* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 41-58, especially 41. This book is dedicated to the memory of Merleau-Ponty. But see also Jacques Derrida, "Cogito et histoire de la folie," in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Points Seuil, 1976), 86-88; English translation by Alan Bass as "Cogito and the History of Madness," in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 56-58. On these pages, Derrida stresses, hyperbolically, the importance of the starting point in the *cogito*.

⁷ Michel Foucault, "La pensée du dehors," in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975* (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 2001), 546-567; English translation by Brian Massumi as "The Thought of the Outside," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, volume 2: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, Paul Rabinow, series editor (New York: The New Press, 1998), 147-169.

⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Paris: Minuit, 1986), p. 93; English translation by Seán Hand as *Foucault* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 87.

⁹ Of course "deconstruction" is a Derridean term. Nevertheless, Foucault speaks of a "destruction" of "the anthropological quadrilateral in its foundation." See Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Tel Gallimard, 1966), 353; anonymous English translation as *The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 341.

- ¹⁰ Foucault, “La pensée du dehors,” in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, 547; “The Thought of the Outside,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, volume 2*, 148.
- ¹¹ Foucault, “La pensée du dehors,” in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, 566; “The Thought of the Outside,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, volume 2*, 167.
- ¹² Michel Foucault, “Préface,” in *Dits et Écrits I, 1954-1975* (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 2001), 192; English translation by Jean Khalfa and Jonathan Murphy as “Preface to the 1961 Edition,” in *History of Madness* (London: Routledge, 2006), xxxiii.
- ¹³ Foucault, “La pensée du dehors,” in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, 560-565; “The Thought of the Outside,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, volume 2*, 160-165.
- ¹⁴ Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, 314-354; anonymous English translation as *The Order of Things*, 303-343.
- ¹⁵ Foucault, “La pensée du dehors,” in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, 547; “The Thought of the Outside,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, volume 2*, 148.
- ¹⁶ Foucault, “La pensée du dehors,” in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, 547; “The Thought of the Outside,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, volume 2*, 148.
- ¹⁷ See Deleuze and Guattari, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?*, 50; *What is Philosophy?*, 48-49.
- ¹⁸ Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, p. 351; *The Order of Things*, 340. In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault uses the word “remanence” to refer to repetition. See Michel Foucault, *L’archéologie du savoir* (Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1969), 162; English translation by A. M. Sheridan Smith as *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 123.
- ¹⁹ Foucault, *L’archéologie du savoir*, p. 173; *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 131.
- ²⁰ Foucault will locate violence within power. See Michel Foucault, *Le pouvoir psychiatrique. Cours au Collège de France. 1973-1974* (Paris: Hautes Études Gallimard Seuil, 2003), 15-16; English translation by Graham Burchell as *Psychiatric Power. Lectures at the Collège de France. 1973-1974* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 16.
- ²¹ Foucault, “La pensée du dehors,” in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, 562; “The Thought of the Outside,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, volume 2*, 163. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault says, “[man] is taken within a power that disperses him.” See Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, 345; *The Order of Things*, 334.
- ²² Foucault, “La pensée du dehors,” in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, 553; “The Thought of the Outside,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, volume 2*, 154.
- ²³ Foucault, “La pensée du dehors,” in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, 553-54; “The Thought of the Outside,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, volume 2*, 154.
- ²⁴ For formulas very similar to these in Foucault, see Derrida’s discussion of Heidegger in his 1964 essay on Levinas, “Violence and Metaphysics.” Jacques Derrida, “Violence et métaphysique,” in *L’écriture et la différence* (Paris: Points Seuil, 1967), 196-224, especially, 207-08; English translation by Alan Bass as “Violence and Metaphysics,” in *Writing and Difference* (Paris: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 134-151, especially 141.
- ²⁵ Foucault makes this suggestion through his use of the verb “éprouver.” Foucault, “La pensée du dehors,” in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, 553-54; “The Thought of the Outside,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, volume 2*, 154.

- ²⁶ Foucault, “La pensée du dehors,” in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, 553; “The Thought of the Outside,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, volume 2*, 153.
- ²⁷ Foucault, “La pensée du dehors,” in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, 553; “The Thought of the Outside,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, volume 2*, 153.
- ²⁸ Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*, (Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1971), 7; English translation by A. M. Sheridan Smith as “The Discourse on Language,” in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 215.
- ²⁹ Fred Evans has developed an important conception of the voice in *The Multivoiced Body: Society and Communication in the Age of Diversity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), see especially 144-168 and 280-282.
- ³⁰ It is perhaps possible to associate these two laws with the opening disjunction between the return to Platonism and naturalism. Perhaps the return to Platonism is nothing but repetition, while naturalism is a grotesque singularization.