

# The Idea of the Body in German Culture: Marx, Nietzsche, Freud

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This essay links ‘epochal’ authors of modern German thought, such as Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, via a concise, schematic exegesis of their respective theories of the body and its capacities. The author argues that Marx exhibits a significant anthropological deficit: his thought lacks any appreciation of the body as a means of enriching and mediating the Marxist tradition’s absolute values – equality and ‘the common good’ – and the value of individuality, of that which cannot be reduced to what is shared in human beings. Nietzsche, on the other hand, radically expands the concept of the body. The whole of reality is basically reduced to bodily ontology: a vitalist philosophy in which the perpetual struggle between active and passive forces dissolves any fixed variance in human experience, thus opening the door to postmodern deconstruction, particularly in the Deleuzian sense. Only in Freud does the ‘dual’ nature of the human being – as both a biological animal and a historical-social subject – find its adequate expression.

Questo saggio lega autori ‘epocali’ della cultura tedesca moderna, quali Marx, Nietzsche e Freud attraverso un’esegesi rapida e schematica della loro teorizzazione di ciò che sia e di ciò che possa un corpo. L’autore sottolinea la presenza in Marx di un grave deficit antropologico rispetto all’assenza nel suo pensiero di una valorizzazione del corpo che possa fecondare e mediare l’assolutezza, nella tradizione marxista, dell’eguaglianza e del ‘comune’, con il valore dell’individuazione e di ciò che nell’essere umano è irriducibile al comune. Invece in Nietzsche il corpo è dilatato alla massima potenza. L’intera realtà è di fondo ridotta a una ontologia corporea, a una filosofia della vita in cui la lotta, costantemente rinnovantesi, tra forze attive e forze passive sottrae ogni invarianza all’esperienza umana, aprendo le porte in questo modo alla decostruzione postmoderna, in particolare deleuziana. Solo con Freud il carattere ‘bino’ dell’essere umano, di comporre cioè animalità biologica e dimensione storico-sociale, trova la sua adeguata espressione.

Keywords: *Marx’s deficit, anthropological essentialism, body’s metaphysic, mind/body, anti-authoritarianism*

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# The Idea of the Body in German Culture: Marx, Nietzsche, Freud

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The aim of this essay is to revisit connections between authors such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud, mapping out a trajectory through German culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It once again brings up the triad of those «masters of suspicion» famously discussed by Paul Ricoeur in his celebrated book. However, unlike in the French author's work, the three are brought together here to engage in dialogue and confrontation – not merely as radically critical thinkers – though each in very different ways – of any claim to the completeness or centrality of consciousness, the self, or reason in shaping our interpretations of reality, individual and collective life, culture and history. Here, instead, the vantage point is in the body, with the aim of demonstrating how particular ways of valuing – or failing to value – corporeality, in its broad sense as a biologically, phylogenetically, and historically relational complex, have conditioned and structured these three distinct *Weltanschauungen*. These worldviews not only shaped and spanned our modernity, but continue to operate at the very core of our contemporary experience.

## 1. 'GLORIOUS' AND 'INGLORIOUS' BODY IN KARL MARX'S THOUGHT

In my view, the focus on the body in Marx can be understood through three possible configurations – the first two presenting variations on the same figure, while the third marks a shift to a profoundly different theoretical constellation.

According to Marx's theorisation in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, the first concept of what «body» is distinguishes between the physical body and the body as the vehicle of species-life. The body, reduced to mere biological and physical reproduction of itself, is for Marx a dehumanised body, indistinguishable from the animal natures, which – Hegelianly – are oriented solely toward the

reproduction of themselves as individual beings closed within their egoistic interest. It is the merely animal or bestial corporeality, characterised by a constant repetition/reproduction of need, in which human life is constrained and enclosed under the regime of private property, and most intensely under capitalist society, when all communal ties are dissolved and extreme individualism becomes the governing principle of life. This is a condition, strongly inspired by the Hegelian theorisation of nature, in which the world is understood as a realm devoid of social relations, devoid of relation to the other (what Hegel would have called Spirit, the *Geist*), and where the body is only a locus of poverty, lack, and «need for the preservation of physical existence», within which human life unfolds and reproduces itself. The body is thus unambiguously natural and, as such, devoid of value because it is unmediated by historicity or sociality. Under capitalism

[...] erstens erscheint dem Menschen die Arbeit, die *Lebenstätigkeit*, das *produktive Leben* selbst nur als in *Mittel* zur Befriedigung eines Bedürfnisses, des Bedürfnisses der Erhaltung der physischen Existenz. Das produktive Leben ist aber das Gattungslieben. Es ist das Leben erzeugende Leben. In der Art der Lebenstätigkeit liegt der ganze Charakter einer species [...] und die frei bewußte Tätigkeit der Gattungscharakter des Menschen. Das Leben selbst erscheint nur als *Lebensmittel*<sup>1</sup>.

In contrast to this body, which only represents *individual life*, stands the human body as *generic being* – that is, universal and communal being – in which the *Gattung* is immanent, as the essence that makes the individual involved, and immediately united, with all other human beings. Human life as *Gattungswesen* is thus profoundly different from natural life: as the site of universality, of an essence that is not finite but infinite, it is what makes human beings free, liberating them from the localism and closure of animalistic need, while simultaneously situating them within the unlimited horizon and space of historical action.

Der Mensch ist ein Gattungswesen, nicht nur indem er praktisch und theoretisch die Gattung, sowohl seine eigne als die der übrigen Dinge, zu seinem Gegenstand macht, [...] sondern auch indem er sich zu sich selbst als der gegenwärtigen, lebendigen Gattung verhält, indem er sich zu sich als einem *universellen*, darum freien Wesen verhält<sup>2</sup>.

1 Karl Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844*, in Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Ergänzungsbd.: *Schriften bis 1844*, Teil 1., Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1973, p. 465-588: 516.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 514.

Indeed, precisely as bearers of the *Gattung* (species), human beings are capable of disentangling themselves from the natural niche in which animal life is constrained to unfold and reproduce, and are therefore able to make the entire external world – that is, outside of themselves – the inorganic body of their biological-organic body. Arising from this need for universalisation, the generic body no longer sees objects or the external world as mere means to satisfy utilitarian or practical needs, as occurs in purely natural life, but as the screen upon which to project and manifest one's creative capacities as intrinsically free. The human as *menschliche Gattungswesen* is thus the site in which nature, through the mediation and elaboration of labour, ceases to possess independent consistency or legitimacy, for it can exist only as the object of a subject who finds in it nothing more than the reflection and image of their truest and most universal self. Nature is no longer an object of consumption but of mirroring and identification, in which what is internal becomes external, and what is natural is solely the projection and self-recognition of the super-natural.

Eben in der Bearbeitung der gegenständlichen Welt bewährt sich der Mensch daher erst wirklich als in *Gattungswesen*. Diese Produktion ist sein werktätiges Gattungsleben. Durch sie erscheint die Natur als *sein* Werk und seine Wirklichkeit. Der Gegenstand der Arbeit ist daher die *Vergegenständlichung des Gattungslebens des Menschen*: indem er sich nicht nur wie im Bewußtsein intellektuell, sondern werktätig, wirklich verdoppelt und sich selbst daher in einer von ihm geschaffnen Welt anschaut<sup>3</sup>.

*Gattung*, or *species*, following its explicit derivation from Ludwig Feuerbach, means that a living individuality – specifically, the human – is instantly involved in universality. From this universality follows freedom, viewed as the state of not being conditioned by anything external to oneself. While natural existence does encounter the objects and conditions necessary for its reproduction outside itself and beyond its finitude, generic existence implies self-determination and the reduction of all externality to the articulation and determination of one's own interior.

Das Tier ist unmittelbar eins mit seiner Lebenstätigkeit. Es unterscheidet sich nicht vor ihr. Er ist *sie*. Der Mensch macht seine Lebenstätigkeit selbst zum Gegenstand seines Wollens und seines Bewußtseins. Er hat bewußte Lebenstätigkeit. Es ist nicht eine Bestimmtheit, mit der er unmittelbar zusammenfließt. Die bewußte Lebenstätigkeit unterscheidet den Menschen

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 517.

unmittelbar von der tierischen Lebenstätigkeit. Eben nur dadurch ist er ein Gattungswesen<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, for Marx in the *1844 Manuscripts*, there is a genuine ontological discontinuity between *nature* and *humanity* or, more specifically, between *animality* and *humanity* – a discontinuity of constitution and value. This difference is reconciled and subsumed through the reduction of natural life to the mere *object* of generic life. And the act of such reduction is *labour*, in which the subject reduces the other to a mere object, deprived of autonomous purpose: inorganic body, an extension and continuation of the self.

Die Universalität des Menschen erscheint praktisch eben in der Universalität, die die ganze Natur zu seinem *unorganischen* Körper macht, sowohl insofern sie 1. ein unmittelbares Lebensmittel, als inwiefern sie [2.] die Materie, der Gegenstand und das Werkzeug seiner Lebenstätigkeit ist. Die Natur ist der *unorganische Leib* des Menschen, nämlich die Natur, soweit sie nicht selbst menschlicher Körper ist. Der Mensch lebt von der Natur, heißt: Die Natur ist dein *Leib*, mit dem er in beständigen Prozeß bleiben muß, um nicht zu sterben<sup>5</sup>.

Biological life is alien to true human life. By its very neediness, it compels and presses one to act from a corporeality that, strictly speaking, remains external to genuinely vital activity – the truly productive life of the human, which is such only inasmuch as it produces universals rather than particulars. For this Marx, alienation actually consists in the inversion of generic and biological life. Where the *Gattung* governs the *Bios* in true existence, in alienation it is the *Bios* that dominates the *Gattung*. «Die entfremdete Arbeit kehrt das Verhältnis dahin um, daß der Mensch eben, weil ere in bewußtes Wesen ist, seine Lebenstätigkeit, sein *Wese* nur zu einem Mittel für seine Existenz macht»<sup>6</sup>. This ontological reversal between natural-animal-individualistic existence and generic existence makes up the fundamental knot of labour praxis in modern capitalist society. It defines the genetic locus of alienation, where the worker lives solely for immediate natural life. It appears evident that the historical inevitability and necessity of future communism lies within this interplay between existence and essence. However suppressed or contradicted, the ontological supremacy of essence over existence – the intrinsically free, universal and communal nature of the human being – can ultimately only reassert its ontological and

4 *Ibid.*, p. 516.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 515-516.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 516.

social primacy. Moreover, in contrast to the exclusion effected by the biological-physical body in its immediate naturalistic presence, it is only the species-body that allows the physical body to be incorporated within the self, removing it from mere materiality and expanding it to the universal measure of the essence it contains.

It is only the continuity of this *species-body*, in which all oppositions – subject/object, nature/history, spirit/matter, individual/society – are transcended, that guarantees a form of life adequate to the human being. Indeed, it is only within this framework that the sensory apparatus of the human organism becomes truly sensitive and perceptive, since it is expanded into a universal field that removes any rigidity or possible discontinuity between interiority and exteriority.

Der Mensch verliert sich nur dann nicht in seinem Gegenstand, wenn dieser ihm als *menschlicher* Gegenstand oder gegenständlicher Mensch wird. Dies ist nur möglich, indem er ihm als *gesellschaftlicher* Gegenstand und er selbst sich als gesellschaftliches Wesen, wie die Gesellschaft als Wesen fuur ihn in diesen Gegenstand wird. [...] [D]arum sind die Sinne des gesellschaftlichen Menschen *andere* Sinne wie die des ungesellschaftlichen; Erst durch den gegenständlich entfalteten Reichtum des menschlichen Wesens wird der Reichtum der subjektiven *menschlichen* Sinnlichkeit, wird ein musikalisches Ohr, ein Auge für die Schönheit der Form, kurz, werden erst menschlicher Genüsse fähige *Sinne*, Sinne, welche als *menschliche* Wesenskräfte sich bestätigen [...]<sup>7</sup>.

The *physical body*, in its instant naturalness, stands in opposition to the *species-body*; it is other, alienated from it. Only the species-body allows the physical body to be incorporated within the self, removing it from its material finality and expanding it to the universal measure of the essence it contains.

B. In *The German Ideology*<sup>8</sup>, with a focus that continues into the *Grundrisse*, Marx's reflection on the body and need develops according

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 541.

<sup>8</sup> The new critical edition of *Die deutsche Ideologie* (in *Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch*, 2003, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2004) has shown that Engels and Marx did not conceive a plan for an organic work entitled *Die deutsche Ideologie* either in the spring or in the autumn of 1845. Rather, they left a number of manuscript texts – each devoted to the critique of post-Hegelian philosophy – which are largely autonomous, vary considerably in length, and were sometimes written in several versions; they begin with a manuscript criticising Bruno Bauer. The editorial decision to present these fragmentary texts as a single, coherent work has to do with the cultural and political choices of the posthumous editors. On this point, see the *Einführung* in *Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch* (2003), p. 5-28. For ease of reference, the present work will nevertheless continue to cite the Italian translation which, having preceded the critical edition, still understandably treats

to the paradigm of *Individualismus* versus *Gattung* (Individual versus Species), but with a further theoretical clarification at the level of categories and a far more decisive grounding of this conceptual pair in history than in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. At the level of categories, in *The German Ideology* Marx draws a clear distinction between *Praxis* and *Arbeit*. *Praxis*, or *Selbstbestätigung*, or *menschliche Thätigkeit*, is the specifically human activity, in which the human being – intended as a collective individuality – affirms their own essence, their independence from the given and their capacity for universalisation, in the object they produce or the action they perform. It is action in which the subject, through engagement with the object and the material world, elaborates and produces *themselves*, objectifying in the object their faculties, which are not finite or limited, but of the species – *Gattung* – that is, specific to humans and distinct from all other species. *Praxis* is thus synonymous with action that, by its ability to resist passively given natural and environmental conditions, necessarily entails cooperation and collective participation: a genuinely *species-specific dimension*.

*Arbeit*, by contrast, denotes (wholly negatively) activity aimed solely at the material and bodily reproduction of humans in their individual singularity. It stands opposed to *Praxis* understood as *Selbstbestätigung*, that is, the activation and affirmation of the self. It is therefore nothing but alienation and toil – the negative form of self-affirmation (*negative Form der Selbstbestätigung*)<sup>9</sup> – because, as noted, through it the human affirms only their naturalistic individuality. As such, labour is always passive activity and always divided activity: divided because it separates the individual and their egoistic interests from more general and less material concerns, and divided because, in the absence of a collective and communal dimension, it obliges each person – through the division of labour – to engage in only partial and limited operations.

For the Marx of the *Deutsche Ideologie*, history up to this point has always been the history of *Arbeit*: a history characterised by the division of labour and its structural, inescapable schisms and oppositions (class antagonisms). Yet with the maturation of modern capitalist society, Marx believes that humanity is approaching the transition from the praxis of *Arbeit* to that of *Thätigkeit*, since within the very historical-social dimension of *Arbeit* the conditions for its transcendence

*L'ideologia tedesca* as a unitary text – also because, in my view, the fragmentary character of the manuscripts does nothing to diminish their fundamental conceptual unity.

9 Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels, *Feuerbach und Geschichte. Entwurf S. 36 bis 72*, in Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels – Joseph Weydemeyer, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, bearb. v. Inge Taubert – Hans Pelger, «Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch» (2003), p. 47-98: 89.

are already emerging. Capitalism, having developed to the point of creating a world market, universalises the human being, freeing them from the constraints of local and national identity and placing them in a condition of «universal dependence» on the material (and spiritual) production of the entire world. In the capitalist development of productive forces, «die in *weltgeschichtlichem, statt der in lokalen Dasein der Menschen vorhandne empirische Existenz*»<sup>10</sup> is already implicitly contained. Upon reaching maturity, capitalist society produces universal relations of exchange and the overcoming of every naturalistic limit and fixity, a «naturwüchsige Form des *weltgeschichtlichen Zusammenwirkens der Individuen* [...]»<sup>11</sup>.

Die große Industrie universalisierte [...] die Konkurrenz [...], stellte die Kommunikationsmittel und den modernen Weltmarkt her [...]. Sie zwang durch die universelle Konkurrenz alle Individuen zur äußersten Anspannung ihrer Energie. Sie vernichtete möglichst die Ideologie, Religion, Moral etc., und wo sie dies nicht konnte, machte sie zur handgreiflichen Lüge. Sie erzeugte insoweit erst die Weltgeschichte, als sie jede zivilisierte Nation und jedes Individuum darin in der Befriedigung seiner Bedürfnisse [...]. Sie subsumierte die Naturwissenschaft unter das Kapital und nahm der Teilung der Arbeit den letzten Schein der Naturwüchsigkeit. Sie vernichtete überhaupt die Naturwüchsigkeit, soweit dies innerhalb der Arbeit möglich ist, und löste alle naturwüchsigen Verhältnisse in Geldverhältnisse auf. [...] Sie erzeugte im Allgemein überall dieselben Verhältnisse zwischen den Klassen der Gesellschaft und vernichtete dadurch die Besonderheit der einzelnen Nationalitäten<sup>12</sup>.

Thus, the world market produces an anthropology that is itself potentially universal: a subjectivity which, through the global expansion of its network of relations, transcends the limits of its biological and natural life, giving rise to a nature characterised by universalisation and community. Here, the individual of *historically and humanly determined species-being* surpasses and transcends the individual of the body and of natural, biological species-being.

Yet under capitalism, this universal development of productive forces – and of the «totalen Individuen»<sup>13</sup> that potentially arise with them – occurs within the framework of the generalized relation of private property and the division of society into classes. Consequently,

10 Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels, *Die deutsche Ideologie* (1845-1846), in Idd., *Werke*, Bd. 3, Dietz Verlag Berlin 1973, p. 9-530: 34.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

13 Marx – Engels, *Feuerbach und Geschichte. Entwurf S. 36 bis 72, op. cit.*, p. 91.

for the individual, the historical realisation of the universal and of the full power of life can appear only in the *alienated* form of a power that dominates and estranges them. It is only through communism, and its revolutionary enactment, that the reality of a super-naturalistic and super-localistic universality of humanity (already achieved in the materiality of production and the universality of market relations) can be embraced and freed from the juridical form – which by now is merely external – of relations of possession and distribution of wealth, still based on the rights of the individual against the collective. Here, as it seems to me, Marx remains to some extent a victim of the essentialism of the *Gattung* that already characterised his *1844 Manuscripts*, despite the explicitly anti-F Feuerbachian turn of the *Theses on Feuerbach* and the entirety of *The German Ideology*. For the collectivism of *species* is no longer metaphysically *implied* in history, as in the Paris Manuscript; rather, it is produced by history itself which, through technological development, ends up «spontaneously» generating the unification of humankind, without a conscious plan or intention.

C. Only in *Das Kapital* and in certain passages of the *Grundrisse* does Marx propose another paradigm of corporeality, one that departs radically from the previous paradigm of *Individuality versus Universality, Private versus Common, Nature versus History/Culture*, which underlies the first two significations of the body (*A and B*).

In *The Capital*, the body is identified with labour-power, the identity of an abstract individual whose abstraction no longer concerns the separation of private, naturalistic, and egoistic interests from the general interest – that is, no longer the separation of the individual from the «species» – but from any possible form of ownership or control over the means of production (land, tools and machinery, raw materials). Marx's theorisation of the body as labour-power therefore refers to the historical-social separation of a social group from any possible relation to the world-environment, due to the interposition between it and the *Umwelt* of another or other social groups who claim ownership and monopolistic control of that world. This creates, on the historical-social plane, not an abstract individual separated from all others, but a social class that is *free* – in the sense of being dispossessed – of any relation to the world-environment, and therefore capable of selling only its body/labour as the sole source of sustenance for its life.

*Trennung des Eigentums von der Arbeit* erscheint als notwendiges Gesetz dieses Austauschs zwischen Kapital und Arbeit. Die Arbeit als das *Nicht-Kapital* als solches gesetzt, ist: 1) *Nicht-vergegenständlichte Arbeit*, negativ gefaßt, (selbst noch

gegenständlich; das Nichtgegenständliche selbst in objektiver Form). Als solche ist die Nicht-Rohstoff, Nicht-Arbeitsinstrument, Nicht-Rohprodukt: die von allen Arbeitsmitteln und Arbeitsgegenständen, von ihrer ganzen Objektivität getrennte Arbeit. Die lebendige als *Abstraktion* von diesen Momenten ihrer realen Wirklichkeit existierende Arbeit (ebenso Nicht-Wer); diese völlige Entblößung, aller Objektivität bare, rein subjektive Existenz der Arbeit. Die Arbeit als *absolute Armut*: die Armut, nicht als Mangel, sondern als völliges Ausschließen des gegenständlichen Reichtums<sup>14</sup>.

This nature of the relationship between modern labour and the *external world* necessarily implies a corresponding relationship between modern labour and the internal world. The absence of mediating relations with the external world means that, for Marx, *freie Arbeit* features an equal absence of mediation regarding the connection between the body and the person who performs that labour. The person, lacking mediation with the external world, is forced to exist merely as a body – immediate corporeality. That is, in living or «lebendige Arbeit», as Marx also terms it, body and person coincide immediately, without any possible distance between them. The person, therefore, cannot possess an extension of reality or a domain of meaning that exceeds or is separate from the body.

Oder auch [die Arbeit] als der existierende *Nicht-Wert* und daher rein gegenständliche Gebrauchswert, ohne Vermittlung existierend, kann diese Gegenständlichkeit nur reine nicht von der Person getrennte: nur reine mit ihrer unmittelbaren Leiblichkeit zusammenfallende sein. Indem die Gegenständlichkeit rein unmittelbar ist, ist sie ebenso unmittelbar Nicht- Gegenständlichkeit. In anderen Worten: keine außer dem unmittelbaren Dasein des Individuums selbst fallende Gegenständlichkeit<sup>15</sup>.

Being divided from the external world, individuals are thus indivisible within themselves: body = person, or person = body. Immediate «materiality» which, insofar as it is embodied and coincident with a person, may also be described as immediate «non-materiality».

This corporeal invasiveness within the person, this reduction of the person to mere body, makes the human being a body whose mind, we might add, can never emerge internally but is always deposited externally. Whether through the imposition of need and the command of consumption in the sphere of reproduction, or as an

<sup>14</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (1857-1858), Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1974, p. 203.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

organic component of the labour-power/machine system – where the use of labour-power is synchronised with commands and work plans embedded in machinery – in both realms of life, labour-power constitutes itself as a body without its own mind, capable of living only as subordinate to an external mind.

D. What emerges, in conclusion, is that throughout Marx's work there appears to be an absence of deep reflection on the constitution and role of the body in the human being. In Marx's thought, the dominant theme appears in other words to be a concept of *human nature resolved fundamentally in intersubjectivity and social relations*. As the famous Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach states: «Feuerbach löst das religiöse Wesen in das menschliche Wesen auf. Aber das menschliche Wesen ist kein dem einzelnen Individuum inwohnendes Abstraktum. In seiner Wirklichkeit ist es das ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse»<sup>16</sup>. In other words, Marx does not appear to have considered, nor perhaps could he have, given his cultural and political formation, the valuation of the human body – as the most *individuating and motivating foundation* of human life.

In Marxian anthropology, from the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts to the historical-materialist theorisation of *The German Ideology*, the body is certainly present as the locus of unavoidable and universally shared needs. Yet due to this compulsion and mandatory condition, it remains the foundation of a history still belonging to nature, since history properly belongs to social formations and their emergence and decline. When the body does enter history, it appears as the collective body of humankind, which, through the development of productive forces, becomes unified in a universal and global individuality. Nor is the prioritisation of needs absent in *The German Ideology*, as is well known, serving as a materialist foundation against idealist philosophies: their satisfaction represents the first historical action, always to be repeated «täglich und stündlich [...], um die Menschen nur am Leben zu erhalten»<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, the evolution of means of production and accompanying social formations constantly generates new needs. For this reason, many scholars rightly note that Marx and Engels' theory of historical materialism contains not a naturalistic or rigidly repetitive theory of needs but one of profoundly historical-cultural character, generated in each instance by changes in the mode of production and social relations therein. Nevertheless, need

16 Karl Marx, *Thesen über Feuerbach* (1845), in Marx – *Werke*, Bd. 3, *op. cit.*, p. 5-7: 6.

17 Marx – Engel, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

in these texts still signals lack, negativity, and disvalue – overturned only through the mediation and activity of human labour. Needs are again relegated to an *external framework* relative to the self-generative capacity of the *homo faber*, whose ‘fabrication’ – and the entire structure of division of labour arising from it – forms the primary axis of meaning not only of sociality but of human existence as a whole.

What is missing throughout Marx’s thought is, then, the *transition of the body from disvalue to value* – not, of course, in the economic sense, since this occurs with the capitalist valorisation of labour-power – but in the anthropological-existential sense, as individuating and differentiating.

With insights from psychoanalytic culture and an adequate ecological perspective on the living being, one might now say that there is no vision that conceives the body as simultaneously: (i) the outcome of generational and biological-phylogenetic history, and (ii) an organism composed of many ‘individuals’, in Spinozist terms, whose combination follows a *ratio*, a law of composition and concordance, unique to each, impossible to reproduce and incomparable to any other. From this, the body emerges as the locus of meaning, of intentionality, of projectuality and life-preservation, through which the human organises, selects, and constructs their vision of the world in mediation with otherness.

Yet it must also be acknowledged that the transition from *the species-body* to the *body as labour-power* marks a profound shift in Marx’s maturing thought. He moves from the anthropocentrism and humanistic essentialism characteristic, in my view, of the early phase of his work – including *The German Ideology* and the historical-materialist theory – to the science of modernity, for which the category of labour-power forms the founding principle. That is, Marx moves from a focus on labour as the self-realising activity of the *homo faber* to the *paradigm of labour-power*, a historically generated category rather than a metaphysically implied one, whose function is fully explained within the totality of the capitalist economy. All this concerns Marx’s transition – from the metaphysics and philosophy of history of historical materialism to the science of *The Capital* – which he never fully explicates epistemologically, and is beyond the scope of the present discussion<sup>18</sup>.

18 On this discussion of ‘canon’ in Marx’s work, I refer readers to my overall interpretation of his thought in two of my works: *A Failed Parricide: Hegel and the Young Marx* (Brill, Leiden-Boston 2016); Italian edition: *Un parricidio mancato. Il confronto finale di Marx con Hegel* (Jaca Book, Milano 2014). See also my earlier work *Abstraction and Dialectic from Romanticism to Capitalism: An Essay on Marx*, Bulzoni, Roma 1987.

What remains to be said is that what I have attempted to summarise regarding the body in Marx constitutes, in my view, the anthropological *deficit* that structurally marks his otherwise monumental thought: a deficit inherited by all forms of Marxism that have neglected the fact that Marx's revolutionary project and the overcoming of capitalism were flawed by a theory of *socialisation without individuation*. That is, by a monochromatic valorisation of what is common and equal, without including, within this horizon of emancipation, the equally indispensable value of difference, of the existential, of all that has the right to be distinct and autonomous from the collective.

## 2. FRIEDERICH NIETZSCHE: AN OVERWHELMING BODY

### 2.1 *Authenticity As «Will to Power»*

The *revolt of the existential* could be defined as what occurs in the history of philosophy and German culture with the completion of the great theoretical systems of German Idealism, structured around the rationales of history, social and political institutions, and collective cultures and religions. A paradigm shift advancing the claims of individual subjectivity, in search of a singular authenticity of life, is proposed with Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, in opposition to the supra-individual dimension of the «world-spirit», whether in Hegel's conception of *Geist* or in Schelling's system of identity. This is a claim not so much for autonomy, in the classical liberal sense, as for authenticity and individuation – a polemical objective that, from a retrospective viewpoint and as noted earlier, can be seen to include the Marxist conception of history and society.

From his earliest writings, Friedrich Nietzsche promoted the thesis of the value of each human being as irreducibly unique rather than collective, according to which «jeder Mensch ein einmaliges Wunder ist»<sup>19</sup>. As he writes in the third of the *Untimely Meditations*, *On Schopenhauer as Educator*: «Im Grunde weiss jeder Mensch recht wohl, dass er nur einmal, als in Unicum, auf der Welt ist und dass kein noch so seltsamer Zufall zum zweiten mal ein so wunderbar buntes Mancherlei zum Einerlei, wie er ist, zusammenschütteln wird [...]»<sup>20</sup>.

This insight actually forms the theoretical foundation of Nietzsche's thought and remains a constant inspiration throughout his

19 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer als Erzieher* (1874), in Id., *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, De Gruyter, Bd. 1, p. 335-427: 337-338.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 337.

philosophy, across its various phases. Each human being is an individuality that cannot be repeated, whose uniqueness derives from the specific *composition of forces* of which they always represent the result. For Nietzsche, each person is a scenario of forces, impulses, instincts and desires – multiple and conflicting – *whose coexistence may result in either the affirmation and flourishing of life or its mortification and annihilation.*

Even drawing upon his profoundly troubled personal experience – where periods of depression and suffering alternated with more expansive and creative phases, culminating in the psychotic crisis in Turin – Nietzsche reinterprets, in his own deeply personal way, Kant's thesis in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the subject is always a *synthesis of multiplicity*. The human being, in Nietzschean anthropology, possesses a social and collective dimension, internal rather than merely external. They constitute a *societas interior*, a field of forces encompassing knowing, desiring, loving, hating, altruistic and magnanimous impulses alongside egoistic and aggressive ones. These forces may be coherently unified under the energy of a hegemonic force capable of producing sense, harmony, and integration among the diverse drives – enabling the *affirmation of life* – or they may conflict and fragment into a condition of anarchy, resolvable only through a sterile compromise devoid of energy, which negates the value and authenticity of life. For Nietzsche, then – envisaging, in this respect, some insights later formalised in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory – the human being is a composite of drives. Ignoring this complexity of vital impulses, the richness of experience, and the compositional energy that a *will to live* entails, leads to *nihilism*: a radical discontent arising from the absence of value in one's existence. To compensate for this internal void, individuals adopt culturally imposed values, institutions, practices, and behaviours, codified and publicly shared, generating only a symbiotic, group-based identity. Against modern civilisation, characterised by positivist culture and unconditional belief in science and progress, in industrial and technological development, in mastery over nature, and in the resolution of humanity's fundamental problems through scientific application – a humanity that believes it can dominate, through science, both natural objects and the social life of individuals in communities, as well as suffering and evil – Nietzsche posits the ideal, not of domination over others, but of *mastery over oneself*: the capacity to impose, through the unity of a hegemonic force, order upon the multiplicity and discordance of one's instinctual impulses.

This moment-to-moment coincidence with one's self – the capacity to affirm one's individuality in the singularity of one's composition of forces—is what Nietzsche calls the «will to power»: not over others, as is often misinterpreted, but over oneself. And not as a blind and

irrational will, à la Schopenhauer, which negates all self-affirmation, but as the affirmation of a life instance which, in the balance between Apollonian and Dionysian forces, dissipates nothing of itself.

However, Nietzsche's critique of science is not merely a critique of what he perceives as the myth of Enlightenment and positivism – the belief in human history as a progressive journey from darkness to light. Nor is it only a critique of bourgeois order, structured by roles and professions. It is, above all, a *critique of the very concept of truth*. There can be no universal truth valid for all, since in reality there exist only individualities, each time the product of a particular and never stable *composition* of forces. *Objectivity*, in the sense of an independent reality, *cannot* exist, because existence always refers to a specific structure of the *subjective*, differing each time and susceptible to inexhaustible reconfigurations. To veil this non-truth with the claim of an objectively universal truth, and to construct a world organised according to permanent values and laws, constitutes, for Nietzsche, the most radical self-denial and self-censorship of life and its permanent structure of complexity and crisis. Paradoxically, this self-denial has been precisely the effect of the civilising and educational processes of Western man, which, from classical Greek philosophy onwards – from Socrates and Plato – have employed categories such as *subject, object, substance, self, reason, method, law and value* to reduce to simplicity and clarity that which, as life and as a complex of interwoven forces, can never be fully defined or identified. For Nietzsche, therefore, in a radical inversion of their traditional meaning, science, philosophy, morality, religion – indeed, all cultural production – is synonymous with a falsification of the true nature of life: it is *nihilism*, the superimposition of non-life upon life. Indeed, Nietzsche's extreme overturning of traditional values allows him to write, about himself, in this context.

Ich kenne mein Loos. Es wird sich einmal an meinen Namen die Erinnerung an etwas Ungeheures anknüpfen – an eine Krisis, wie es keine auf Erden gab, an die tiefste Gewissens-Collision, an eine Entscheidung heraufbeschworen *gegen* Alles, was bis dahin geglaubt, gefordert, geheiligt worden war. Ich bin kein Mensch, ich bin Dynamit. [...] Der Begriff Politik ist dann gänzlich in einen Geisterkrieg aufgegangen, alle Machtgebilde der alten Gesellschaft sind in die Luft gesprengt – sie ruhen allesamt auf der Lüge: es wird Kriege geben, wie es noch keine auf Erden gegeben hat<sup>21</sup>.

21 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* (1888), in Id., *Samtliche Werke, op. cit.*, Bd. 6, p. 255-374: 365-366.

By contrast with the equality and levelling of the many, promoted by the philosophies of the concept and the universal; by contrast with the myth of brotherhood in Christian love; and by contrast with the solidarity of socialist humanism, what must be asserted is the value of individuation and the capacity to affirm what is *properly human* – indeed, what is «*overhuman*». The «*overman*» (*Übermensch*) is, as noted, far from seeking domination over others. Rather, he is primarily one who manages to will himself, aligning, from moment to moment, with that vital force, with that «*will to power*» (*Wille zur Macht*), which means becoming hegemonic and dominant, in one's interior, over all other forces in turn.

The reading proposed here of Nietzsche's «will to power» must appear, as is evident, very far from socio-political interpretations that view his work as an expression of aristocratic and elitist conservatism, culminating in the celebration of the *aristoi* and in extreme forms of racism and Darwinian social evolutionism<sup>22</sup>. What is advanced here, rather, is a Nietzsche – despite his polemical and often exaggerated socio-political pronouncements – who inaugurates a new value (and a new form of civilisation) of *authenticity*, in opposition both to the value of equality in socialist civilisation and to the value of *individualism* in liberal civilisation. With regard specifically to the liberal tradition, it must be said that authenticity is not synonymous with autonomy. Whereas autonomy asserts emancipation from external authority that constrains and limits, authenticity signifies emancipation from all internal constraint that prevents the greatest possible alignment – with the minimum possible degree of self-censorship – between one's actual potential and the full articulation of one's life.

## 2.2 *Nietzsche As Naturphilosoph*

For Nietzsche, the nature of a force is to assert its own power. Yet this assertion can only occur through the domination of one or more inferior forces, by subordinating, subjugating and taking possession of them. Hence, the essence of a force lies in always existing in relation to one or more other forces, in a relationship the nature of which is constantly that of dominating or being dominated. The *qualitative* differences between forces – which manifest as different capacities to act and react according to the dominant/being-dominated nexus – are always determined, upon closer inspection, by their differing *quantities* of power. Active and

<sup>22</sup> In this sense, cf. Domenico Losurdo, *Nietzsche, il ribelle aristocratico. Biografia intellettuale e bilancio critico*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2002.

reactive forces are qualitatively distinct: some are superior and others inferior, precisely because their different quality corresponds to different degrees of force. Care must also be taken not to reduce force solely to quantity, for in that case one would fall back into a purely mechanical conception. Force is always intentional and purposive. It is force precisely insofar as its aim and purpose is to assert itself and command, and as such it is the expression of a *will*, namely the *Wille zur Macht*, the will to power. As Nietzsche writes: «Der siegreiche Begriff ‘Kraft’, mit dem unsere Physiker Gott und die Welt geschaffen haben, bedarf noch einer Ergänzung: es muß ihm eine innere Welt zugesprochen werden, welche ich bezeichne als ‘Wille zur Macht’, d.h. als unsättliches Verlangen nach Bezeugung der Macht; oder Verwendung, Ausübung der Macht, als Schöpferischen Trieb usw.»<sup>23</sup>. And of course, this is not a singular, ontologically unitary *Wille zur Macht*, entirely unconscious and blind as Nietzsche interprets it in Schopenhauer, but a differentiated and multiple force – ever new and original, capable of a strategy of command depending on the shifting parallelogram of forces in which it is inscribed. Our body is the privileged theatre and scenario of this confrontation and contrast among forces: «unser Leib ist ja nur ein Gesellschaftsbau vieler Seelen»<sup>24</sup>. Our body is indeed woven from a multiplicity of impulses, antagonistic drives, and volitional entities, each striving to assert its own power.

Daß der Mensch eine Vielfalt con Kräften ist, welche in einer Rangordnung stehen, so saß es Befehlende giebt, aber daß auch der Behlende den Gerhochenden alles schaffen muß, was zu ihrer Erhaltung dient, somit selber durch deren Existenz *bedingt* ist. Alle diese lebendige Wesen müssen verwandter Art sein, sonst könnten sie nicht so einander dienen und gehorchen: die Dienenden müssen, in irgendeinem Sinne, auch Gehorchende sein, und in feineren Fällen muß die Rolle zwischen ihnen vorübergehend wechseln, und der, welcher sonst befiehlt, einmal gehorchen. Der Begriff ‘Individuum’ ist falsch<sup>25</sup>.

23 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1884-1885*, in Id., *Samtliche Werke*, *op. cit.*, Bd. 11, p. 563 (June-July 1885). «Drittens ist der Wille nicht nur ein Complex von Fühlen und Denken, sondern vor Allem noch ein *Affect*: und zwar jener Affect des Commandos. Das, was Freiheit des Willens genannt wird, ist wesentlich das Überlegenheits-Gefühl in Hinsicht auf der gehorchen muß: ‘ich bin frei, er muß gehorchen’», *ibid.*, p. 606.

24 Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (1886), in Id., *Samtliche Werke*, *op. cit.*, Bd. p. 9-243: 33.

25 Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1884-1885*, *op. cit.*, p. 461-462 (April-June 1885).

For life to occur, for the continuity of a living being, it is therefore essential, for Nietzsche, that the body constitute itself as a field of domination in which one or more imperative wills assert their hierarchy over submissive and obedient wills, thereby imposing unity upon a discordant and potentially destructive multiplicity. *Active forces, capable of their full will to power, must impose themselves on passive forces* – that is, forces which have inhibited their will to power and have become *merely reactive*, capable of some function only in response to external command.

It is precisely because of this complexity, multiplicity, and richness of forces, and because their dynamic equilibrium constantly shifts and rewrites itself, that the body, far more than consciousness or reflective thought, is for Nietzsche the primary and fundamental site of life: not only biological life, but also cultural, cognitive, scientific, and moral life. The body, through its disposition and arrangement of forces, through its articulation of aristocracy and subordination, judges, interprets, evaluates and chooses<sup>26</sup>.

That is, for Nietzsche – and here lies the greatest innovation of his theory – before being a complex of organs or an intellectual-moral phenomenon that inaugurates perspectives, preferences, and values, the body is itself the active agent of these functions. It performs directly what the philosophical tradition has ascribed to thought, leaving the ego and the life of consciousness only a secondary and derivative role. Indeed, given the distance between bodily life and the abstraction of thought, this role may often be that of producing only false and deforming concepts, inadequate judgments, and false values. Conceptual knowledge, logical understanding, and science – with their laws of repeatability and fixedness – impose order and regularity upon reality that do not belong to it. They proceed by an analytic principle of identity, a linguistic-conceptual distinction between subject and predicate, with categories such as being, substance, thing, object, subject, and equality, which have no correspondence in the ever-changing reality of the will to power and the forces we have considered so far.

But nowadays – with the more advanced scientific understanding of what constitutes a living body – how should we evaluate this monumental enterprise of Nietzsche's, in which he attempts a genuine metaphysics of corporeality, seeking to reduce all the most diverse spheres of reality to a single principle, and to see in the history of cultures, political institutions, and religions nothing but emanations

<sup>26</sup> A key reading for this topic is still Didier Franck, *Nietzsche et l'ombre de Dieu*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris 1998.

and reflections of various bodily configurations? In brief, I believe that at the heart of Nietzsche's design there remains a substantial difficulty in understanding what a biological body truly is. This difficulty ultimately stems from the scientific spirit of his time – that is, a positivist culture that still regarded physics as the supreme science and, in light of the imperialism of physics, was unable to fully appreciate the new achievements and perspectives of biology.

In this regard, one cannot overlook the general influence of the physicalist reductionism of the Berlin School, associated with Hermann von Helmholtz and Emil Du Bois-Reymond, which famously maintained that all natural phenomena can be reduced to common and elementary principles of physics. There are, however, other authors who must also be considered, and who more specifically led Nietzsche toward a physicalist monism of the body, in which the living organism, with its biological materiality, dissolves into purely physical relational fields and dynamics.

Nietzsche's engagement with the natural sciences is evident from his earliest school and university education and remains a constant throughout his theoretical and personal trajectory<sup>27</sup>. The extensive list of books on scientific subjects in his personal library attests to the depth and range of themes he explored, spanning mechanistic and vitalist approaches in physics and biology, physiology and chemistry, Darwinism and atomic theory, critiques of materialism, and the first and second laws of thermodynamics<sup>28</sup>. As early as 1875, his sister E.

<sup>27</sup> For additional context, see the following now dated but still useful works: Alwin Mittasch, *Friedrich Nietzsche als Naturphilosoph*, Kröner, Stuttgart 1952, especially p. 102-127; Alain Juranville, *Physique de Nietzsche*, Denoël-Gonthier, Paris 1973; the original English edition by Babette E. Babich, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science: Reflecting Science on the Ground of Art and Life*, State University of New York Press, Albany (NY) 1994; Babette E. Babich, *Nietzsche, Epistemology, and Philosophy of Science. Nietzsche and the Sciences II*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Key texts in the history of science, particularly 19th-century German science, include: Roger Boscovich, *Theoria philosophiae naturalis*; Ludwig Büchner, *Kraft und Stoff*; Otto Caspari, *Der Zusammenhang der Dinge*; Hermann von Helmholtz, *Über die Erhaltung der Kraft*; Ernst Mach, *Beiträge zur Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältnis des Physischen zum Psychischen*; Robert Mayer, *Mechanik der Wärme*; Carl W. Nägeli, *Mechanisch-physiologische Theorie der Abstammungslehre*. For a list of scientific books in Nietzsche's personal library, see *Schriftum zu Nietzsches Naturphilosophie*, appended to Mittasch, *Friedrich Nietzsche als Naturphilosoph*, 361-364. Also see the list of scientific works Nietzsche borrowed as a professor in Basel between 1870 and 1874: Roger Boscovich, *Philosophia naturalis*; Georg Cantor, *Mathematische Beiträge*; Otto Funke – Rudolf Wagner – Wilhelm Alfred, *Lehrbuch der Physiologie* (2 vols.); Hermann von Helmholtz, *Tonempfindungen*; Hermann Kopp, *Geschichte der Chemie* (2 vols.); Moedler, *Das Wunderbare des Weltalls*; Friedrich Mohr, *Theorie der Bewegung und Kraft*; Claude Servais Mathias Pouillet, *Physik* (2 vols.); Johann Karl Friedrich Zöllner, *Natur der Kometen*; idem, *Enzyklopädie der Physik*, vol. 9.

Förster-Nietzsche reported that, in addition to a «Sammlung eines ungeheuren empirischen Materials der Menschenkenntnis» her brother also planned «historischen, mathematischen, physikalischen, naturwissenschaftlichen und nationalökonomischen Studien»<sup>29</sup>. It is worth mentioning what Nietzsche himself wrote to Franz Overbeck in August of 1881: «In Vertrauen gesagt: das Wenige, was ich mit den Augen arbeiten kann, gehört jetzt fast ausschließlich physiologischen und medizinischen Studien (ich bin so schlecht unterrichtet! – und muß so vieles wirklich *wissen!*)»<sup>30</sup>. From these brief remarks, it is reasonable to surmise that Nietzsche's concept of *force* (*Kraft*) was inevitably shaped by the scientific debates that, particularly in Germany during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, focused on this subject. In this context, Otto Caspari, whose works were part of Nietzsche's library, emerges as a key figure. Drawing upon the great tradition of Leibniz, Caspari rejected any mechanistic view of nature and advanced a dynamic conception that identifies and resolves reality in terms of force. Er [Otto Caspari] führt an, dass «die Kräfte das Dauernde und Bleibende', somit das *Wese, der Dinge* sind, während die stofflichen Zustände wechseln und sich bis zum Unwägbaren und stofflich Minimalen reduzieren – Alle Naturauffassung bemüht sich um die Erforschung ursächlicher Kräfte»<sup>31</sup>.

Against mechanistic materialism, which theorises movement in terms of collision and impact between inert bodies, Caspari asserts that what must be rejected is

die überwundene kindliche Betrachtung des Materialismus, der den Kosmos zu einem toten Klotz mancht, den die Kräfte, welche hier nicht das Wesen der Materie, sondern nur die Prädikate derselben sind, vir sich her wälzen wie der *Deus ex machina seine Welt. Der Stoff ist nichts als die Summe der Kräfte, in welche sich derselbe auflöst*<sup>32</sup>.

However, as for Nietzsche's *Kraftlehre* – his ontological theory of force – the decisive influence on his thought appears, according to the most recent critical literature<sup>33</sup>, to have come, with regard to the

29 Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, *Der junge Nietzsche*, Kröner, Leipzig 1912, p. 387.

30 Letter to Franz Overbeck of 20-21 August 1881, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, hrsg. v. Giorgio Colli – Mazzino Montinari, Abt. 3, Bd. 1: *Briefe von Nietzsche: 1880-1884*, De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 1981, p. 116-118: 117.

31 Otto Caspari, *Die Zusammenhang der Dinge. Gesammelte philosophische Aufsätze* (1881), quoted in Mittasch, *Friedrich Nietzsche als Naturphilosoph, op. cit.*, p. 104.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 105 (my italics).

33 On the connection between the works of Roger G. Boscovich and Nietzsche, cf. Greg Whitlock, *Roger J. Boscovich and Friedrich Nietzsche: A Re-examination*, in Babich, *Nietzsche, Epistemology, and Philosophy of Science, op. cit.*, p. 187-201.

dynamic conception of atoms and matter, from the work of the Jesuit R.J. Boscovich, whom Nietzsche studied as early as 1873-1874. In his research, Boscovich theorised that atoms cannot be understood as corpuscles, as infinitesimal portions of matter, because they are points of force, *Kraftpunkte*, without any extension. For the Dalmatian-Roman Jesuit, bodies are not composed of a continuous matter or of contiguous material particles but of innumerable indivisible, non-extended points. They resolve into forces that are originally infinitely repulsive, diminishing their repulsiveness as the distance between the points decreases, until they transform into attractive forces. Boscovich reduced the mass of bodies to relations of forces and conceived all motion phenomena as products of the action of energies of attraction or repulsion. As a proponent and disseminator of Newtonian theory, reinterpreted in light of Leibnizian motives, he reduced all Newtonian forces to a single principle: repulsion between atomic points at very small distances from each other, and repulsion increasing with distance<sup>34</sup>. At the end of August 1883, Nietzsche wrote to Heinrich: «Damals trieb ich die Atomlehre bis hin zum Quartanten des Jesuiten Boscovich». He continues, stating that Boscovich is the one der zuerst mathematisch demonstriert hat, daß die Annahme erfüllter Atompunkte eine für die strengste Wissenschaft der Mechanik unbrauchbare Hypothese sei»<sup>35</sup>. However, in an earlier letter to the same Köselitz, Nietzsche had already shown an in-depth knowledge of Boscovich's scientific theories.

Against the prejudice of the existence of 'matter' (Stoffe), opposition came not from an idealist but from a mathematician, namely Boscovich. He and Copernicus are the two greatest opponents of deceptive appearances. After him, matter no longer exists, except as a popular idea. He brought atomic theory to its conclusion. Gravity is

34 Roger Joseph Boscovich (Rudjer Josef Bošković) was born in 1711 in Ragusa, Dalmatia, and entered the Jesuit order in 1744. He pursued a wide range of scientific interests and published around one hundred scientific treatises, mostly in Latin, earning a reputation across Europe in both academic and scientific circles. He worked in the field of mathematical astronomy, attempting to determine Newton's law of universal gravitation with greater precision. Of particular relevance here are Boscovich's investigations into the essence and foundations of matter, to which he devoted works such as *De materiae divisibilitate et de principiis corporum dissertatio* (1748); *De continuitatis lege et ejus consecrariis pertinentibus ad prima materiae elementa eorumque vires* (1754); and *De lege virium in natura existentium* (1755). His major work is *Philosophiae naturalis theoria redacta ad unam legem virium in natura existentium*, published in Vienna in 1758.

35 Friederich Nietzsche to Heinrich Köselitz (also called Peter Gast by Nietzsche), Ende August 1883, in Id., *Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, op. cit.*, Abt. 3, Bd. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 441-443: 442.

certainly not a 'property of matter,' simply because there is no matter. The force of gravity, like the *vis inertiae*, is only a phenomenal form of force simply because there is nothing else but force («einfach weil es nichts anderes gibt als Kraft»)<sup>36</sup>.

Regarding the theory of matter, Boscovich's underlying idea is that there is no matter, only force, and consequently, the claim of solid atomic points is an unusable hypothesis for physics. Adopting a *Kraft-Punkt-Welt* (a world made of points of force) means eliminating any residual metaphysics tied to the concept of substance. Mathematician-physicists cannot employ corpuscular atoms (die Klümpchen-Atome) in their science; consequently, they construct a *Kraft-Punkt-Welt* upon which they can rely<sup>37</sup>.

It is also important to note that in Boscovich's natural theory, the overcoming of any substance metaphysics entails the denial of the concept of *infinite force* (as an expression or manifestation of a substantial principle) and, with the recognition of only *finite forces* in the natural world, the denial of any creationist hypothesis implicit in the concept of an infinite force. For this reason, it has been argued, plausibly, that Boscovich may have influenced Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return of the same, as this doctrine is linked to maintaining a certain quantity of energy perpetually. Accordingly, it is no coincidence that in the first formulation of the eternal return, dating to autumn 1881, Nietzsche uses precisely the concept of force to introduce and characterise this fundamental locus of his thought: «Die Welt der Kräfte kommt also nie in ein Gleichgewicht, sie hat nie einen Augenblick der Ruhe, ihre Kraft und ihre Bewegung sind gleich groß für jede Zeit»<sup>38</sup>. The eternal return, breaking the linear conception of time, is the return of the absolute and novel value of each instant, to be read plausibly as a field of ever-new relations among forces: not as the inexhaustible repetition of finite things and entities, but as the infinite duration and variation of a field of finite forces<sup>39</sup>.

36 Friedrich Nietzsche an Heinrich Köselitz, 20. March 1882, *ibid.*, p. 183.

37 In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes: «Was die materialistische Atomistik betrifft: so gehört dieselbe zu den bestwiderlegten Dingen, die es giebt; [...] –Dank vorerst jenem Polen Boscovich, der, mitsammt del Polen Kopernicus, bisher der grösste und siegreichste Gegner des Augenscheins war. Während nämlich Kopernicus uns überredet hat zu glauben, wider alle Sinne, das die Erde *nicht* fest steht, lehrte Boscovich dem Glauben an das Letzte, was von der Erde 'feststand', abschwören, dem Glauben an der 'Stoff', an die 'Materie, ad das Erdenrest- und Klümpchen-Atom [...]» (*op. cit.*, p. 26-27).

38 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1880-1882*, in *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, *op. cit.*, Bd. 9 (1980), p. 9-687: 498 (Frühjahr-Herbst 1881).

39 Cf. Whitlock, Roger J. *Boscovich and Friedrich Nietzsche: A Re-examination*, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

Finally, in this very rapid overview, one must also consider a figure such as Robert Mayer and the possible influence his work may have had on Nietzsche. Mayer's principle of conservation of energy, theorising that the quantity of energy remains constant through all changes in form of energy, undoubtedly places the concept of movement subordinate to that of energy/force, giving Nietzsche the possibility to conceive the play of forces as the composition of continuously varying parallelograms, without destruction of energy, and therefore capable, in their changing interactions, of an eternal return<sup>40</sup>. Above all, in our context, Mayer's doctrine of *Auslösung*, or of *activating*, setting in motion, must be recalled: in the passage from one state to another, from one natural event to another, alongside forces that work – forces of strong energy – there are forces of lesser consistency, capable, however, of directing, organising, and giving form to the stronger but somehow more passive and less vital forces. There are *Wirkkräften*, which perform work, and *Auslösekräften*, or *dirigierende Kräfte*, or *Trieb- or Richtkräfte*), which let work be performed. The force of activation, of unlocking and setting into motion, is a «catalytic force» capable of escaping the mechanistic vision of force as mere quantity and of generating, through a sudden and instantaneous process of release and recomposition of less vital forces, a new state of life. As Mittasch already noted in his text: «Die Wirkkraft der Natur leistet Arbeit, die Auslösekraft lässt Arbeit leisten; gleichwie der Mensch tätig ist, indem er Arbeit leistet oder Arbeit leistet lässt»<sup>41</sup>.

One can also suppose that Nietzsche, inspired by these stimuli, may have derived his critical vision of the mechanical link of cause and effect, and above all of the temporal continuity in which causalist mechanism purports to operate, whereby a given causal magnitude translates seamlessly into its corresponding effect. For Nietzsche, however, the life of every body is never a *continuum*, marked by any persistent identity, but is always the composition, *by chance*, of a new arrangement of powers and impotence. There is no continuity, no structures of permanence or law in the life of the body, but only en-

40 Nietzsche's first reference to Robert Mayer can be found in a postcard mailed from Geneva to Peter Gast (Heinrich Koselitz) on 16 April 1881: «In solche herrliche schlichten und fröhlichen Büchern wie dem Mayer's giebt es eine *Harmonie der Sphären* zu hören: eine Musik, die nur für den *wissenschaftlichen* Menschen bereit ist». Nietzsche's personal library contains the second edition (1873) of *Mechnik der Wärme*, along with the two 1876 essays *Torricellische Leere* and *Über Auslösung*. In the abovementioned letter to Gast, Nietzsche also writes: «'Über Auslösung' ist für mich das *Wesentlichste und Nützlichste* im Buche», in Id., *Briefwechsel*, a.a.O., Abt. 3, Bd. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 84-85.

41 Mittasch, *Friedrich Nietzsche als Naturphilosoph*, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

counters and clashes, in which, as in the casting of dice, something unpredictable and new comes into being each time. This is a manifestation of becoming, theorised precisely in the doctrine of the eternal return.

Here, the return is never of something already given, never the circularity of some identity; rather, it is the return, at every instant, of the absolutely different: of a constantly changing configuration of connections and parallelograms between forces, which removes every possible trace of permanence. The eternal return thus consists of the paradox of a repetition that contains and gives life to its very opposite: the purest becoming, in which each moment has no connection or conditioning whatsoever, neither from the past nor the future. It is a *pure* present, capable of eternity precisely because, in its continual reconfiguration, it depends on nothing, has no ties to past or future, and therefore, precisely because it has no past and no future, is the actuality of the present, always new and different: pure, uncaused and spontaneously generated birth.

At the end of these brief notes, one cannot fail to perceive the deep relevance of Habermas's reflection. He correctly identified Nietzsche as the forerunner and true founder of postmodern theories, among which we can count primarily those of Deleuze and Foucault. Following Nietzsche's work, they refused to read history and society according to principles of permanence and invariance, favouring instead a rhizomatic or microphysical composition of forces that, in their continual becoming, dissolve every structure into a web of relations<sup>42</sup>. With Nietzsche, the culture and civilisation of historicism decline, in favour of a singular theory of temporality, which in its most celebrated locus, that of the eternal return, reveals its greatest difficulty and aporia. For, strictly speaking, the absence of any relation with past or future delivers the present to an atomistic irrelevance, where each actuality of the present exists outside – *entirely apart* – from any other present. In this total abstraction of relationships, in this total coincidence with itself, it is an atom identical to, and undifferentiated from, the other atoms. *In other words, at the base of Nietzschean differentialism and Heracliteanism, what undermines the entire edifice is a strongly identitarian principle, which freezes every desire for variation and becoming within the eternally constant structure of its permanence.*

This conception of time in Nietzsche is so singular and aporetic that one cannot help but consider what Lou Andreas-Salomé wrote

<sup>42</sup> Cfr. Jürgen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1985, in part. cap. 4: *Eintritt in die Postmoderne: Nietzsche als Drehscheibe*, p. 104-129.

in her 1894 text, *Friedrich Nietzsche in seinen Werken*<sup>43</sup>. She observes that Nietzsche's system of thought, despite the variety of his trajectory and its phases, is a complex of concepts and ideas that cannot be interpreted purely from a theoretical point of view, because it constantly expresses a personal and private emotional history. That is, Nietzsche's thought – especially that of the later Nietzsche we have focused on – is fundamentally a self-confession of his dramatic life experience, and his philosophy therefore bears a high degree of exposure to his psychology.

Es ist nicht zu verkennen, wie sehr Nietzsche seinen eignen Seelenzustand diesen Theorien unterlegt, wie stark er sein eignes Wesen in ihnen Wiedergespiegelt, und wie er endlich dem tiefsten Bedürfniss desselben das Grundgesetz des Lebens selbst entnommen hat. Seine leidvolle «Seelen-Vielpältigkeit», seine gewaltsame «Zweispaltung» in einen sich opfernden, anbetenden und in einen beherrschenden, vergöttlichen Wesentheil liegt seinem gesammten Bilde der Menschheitsentwicklung zu Grunde. Ueberall, wo er von Herren- und Sklaven-Naturen spricht, muss man dessen eingedenk bleiben, das er von sich selbst spricht, getrieben von der Sehnsucht einer leidenden und unharmonischen Natur nach ihrem Wesens-Gegensatz [...]. Sein eigenes Ich schildert er, wenn er vom Sklaven sagt: «sein Geist liebt Schlupfwinkel, Schleichwege und Hinterthüren, alles Versteckte muthet ihn an als *seine* Welt, *seine* Sicherheit, *sein* Labsal»: (Zur Genealogie der Moral I 10) – und er beschreibt sein Gegenbild in der handelnden, frohen instinktsicheren, unbekümmerten Herren-Natur, dem ursprünglichen Thatenmeschen<sup>44</sup>.

The risk, therefore, is that the pathological and painful shadow of Nietzsche's *personal body* is projected onto all postmodern theories and their rejection of any dimension and valorisation of identity – onto the entire *cultural body* of the postmodern.

### 3. SIGMUND FREUD: A BODY MUTE IN LANGUAGE

#### 3.1 *Vorstellung und Repräsentation*

Only Freud manages to find the right balance between a body that, on the one hand, is devoid of depth and substance in the face of

<sup>43</sup> Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Friedrich Nietzsche in seinen Werken*, Verlag von Karl Konegen, Wien 1894.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196-197.

the omnipotence of history and social relations, and, on the other, an omnipotent body that reduces history and society to its physicality.

Freud's mediation consists in formulating an anthropology that is at once unified and dual. It starts from the centrality of the biological-pulsional body, which is the locus of meaning and value, but at the same time links this living materiality to the function of language, which does not create meaning but makes it explicit, brings it to light, ensuring it is mediated and satisfied through the principle of external reality.

Only by synthesising the animal-biological component with the cultural-discursive component within the human living organism does Freud succeed in composing a science of man that does not fall into extreme divisions and polarizations. Far from being merely a theoretical practice confined to the clinical space, it presents itself as a genuine philosophy of representation and language.

It is the category of «drive representation» or if one prefers, «drive representative» (in Freud's German, *Triebrepräsenz* or *Triebrepräsident*) that, in my view, best clarifies how the priority of the biological and corporeal materialism from which Freud's anthropology proceeds refers to a living body that is, first and foremost, without language and without any possible inclusion or reduction to forms – even minimal – of intentional consciousness.

Within the general theory of representation (*Vorstellung*) that Freud develops throughout his work, the *Triebrepräsident* is a boundary concept between the somatic and the psychic. It translates into the dimension of feeling (pleasure or displeasure, joy or pain, good or evil) the electro-chemical, kinaesthetic and hormonal rhythms taking place in the body, transporting this biological-quantitative world into the qualitative-sentient sphere of the psyche. The drive – intended as the push, the energetic charge that propels and moves the organism towards a goal to relieve a state of tension – makes up the apex of this transition. It is the structural characteristics of the drive, analytically described by Freud in the 1915 essay *Triebe und Triebchicksale*, that tell us how, at this first, deepest and most original level of the psyche, there exists a mind without even the *slightest degree* of conscious intentionality.

In this work, Freud presents a composite, four-part concept of the drive (*Trieb*), articulated according to the source (*Triebquelle*), the push (*Drang*), the aim (*Treibziel*) and the object (*Objekt*). «Source» refers to the excitation, the energetic overload that arises in a part of the body and demands to be satisfied and pacified; «push» is the action initiated to achieve satisfaction – that is, the sum of force and work the drive can mobilise to achieve its fulfilment; «aim» refers to the

satisfaction and elimination of the initial tension; and «object» means that in which – whether person or thing, fantasy or reality – the drive seeks to reach its aim. This fourfold articulation explains the difference between *Instinkt* and *Trieb*, between animal instinct and human drive, because, in contrast to the fixity of behaviour established by inheritance and present in an almost identical form in all individuals of the same animal species, the *plasticity* of the drive is established – that is, its being separate and therefore relatively indeterminate with respect to its objects and its pulsional aims, with the diversity of methods and practices of satisfaction that follow. The drive, in other words, *being born prior to and independently of the object*, is a process inscribed entirely and initially contained within corporeality and the balance/imbalance of its biological rhythms.

Unter der *Quelle* des Triebes versteht man jenen somatischen Vorgang in einem Organ oder Körperteil, dessen Reiz im Seelenleben durch den Trieb repräsentiert ist. Es ist unbekannt, ob dieser Vorgang regelmäßig chemischer Natur ist oder auch der Entbindung anderer, z. B. mechanischer Kräfte entsprechen kann. Das Studium der Triebquellen gehört der Psychologie nicht mehr an; obwohl die Herkunft aus der somatischen Quelle das schlechteste Entscheidende für den Trieb ist, wird er uns im Seelenleben doch nicht anders als durch seine Ziele bekannt<sup>45</sup>.

The fact that, at its origin, the drive has a wholly biological status – that is, that the drive is a *process with no object* – excludes it from being part, even to the slightest degree (or what some theorise as degree zero), of any intentional and conscious project. Thus, when the drive – once connected to its object/scene of desire – enters into the representative and cognitive process of conscious thought, Freud, in order to include it within the psyche but at the same time preserve its irreducibility to conscious intentionality, must use not the term *Vorstellung* (representation) but *Repräsentation* (representation in the sense of representation by delegation).

In its original meaning, this term belongs not to the logical-gnoseological lexicon but to the political-administrative one. It indicates that body of delegates who, within the institutions of the state, represent before the sovereign prince the interests of the much larger body of subjects and their articulations into estates (*Stände*) or social orders. As a matter of fact, *Repräsentation* enters the German lexicon between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the princes or sovereigns of the

45 Sigmund Freud, *Triebe und Triebchicksale* (1915), in Id., *Werke. Studienausgabe*, Bd. III: *Psychologie des Unbewußten*, S. Fischer, Frankfurt a.M. 1982, p. 75-102: 86.

many German states grant, assigning to them not legislative but only consultative power, Diets or Assemblies in which the various orders or estates of pre-modern society send delegates to make known to the prince – *Dominus* and *Vater* of the entire state – the needs and problems of the different social realities. *Repräsentation*, or *Repräsentanz*, is therefore one of the most typical institutions of German estate-based society in the transition from a feudal-personalistic conception of the state, the absolute property of the prince, to a more polycentric social reality in which orders and corporations have acquired power and recognition. In this context, *Repräsentation* becomes the mediating institution that allows the demands of an alterity – now recognised, albeit only partially, in its dignity and autonomous civil function – to enter into the power of the prince, previously absolute and impenetrable<sup>46</sup>.

The *Triebrepräsenz* (or, in Freud's terminology, also *Triebrepräsenz*) therefore signifies for Freud the *Affektbetrag*, that is, the portion of ongoing somatic process that becomes emotional-affective dimension and enters into the composition of the psychic, which also consists of scenes represented, desired or rejected.

The *Triebrepräsenz* does not therefore produce representations but *translations*, translating into terms of feeling processes and modifications of a somatic nature. Marked by the two extremes of pleasure and displeasure, it constitutes *the place and the source of meaning*: in the dual sense of the feeling of oneself (in terms of *laetitia* or *tristitia*, to use Spinoza's language – that is, intensification or mortification of life), and consequently of the decision – on the basis of this emotional rather than cognitive foundation of good and evil – of what meaning to attribute to our life as the *destination of our present and future*.

It is *the order of feeling*, not of representing or thinking, which is given to us and imposed upon us by that body which is the *exteriority of our interiority* and which, as such, is the true inexhaustible source of the meaning of living – an inexhaustibility and truth that can never be completely reduced to the mind. It is no coincidence that the origin of the structural problem accompanying human existence must be located here. For it is precisely here that the *One becomes Two*: where the *One* of the animal body, which nevertheless belongs to us and within whose biological organisation we are inscribed, is translated into the *Two* of a mind that thinks starting from the body but through the language of society and history. And here, we might add with a touch of imagination, Freud has already anticipated and

46 Cf. the entry 'Repräsentation' by Benedikt Haller, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, hrsg. v. Joachim Ritter – Karlfried Gründer, Schwabe Verlag, Basel 1992, Bd. 8, p. 790-858, especially the juridical-political section, p. 811-826.

criticised every theory of ontological difference in the manner of Heidegger. For what the philosopher of Messkirch defined as the abyssal distance between *Being* and *Being There* – thus bringing back up a category as exhausted and archaic as that of *Being* – finds an anticipated materialistic rewriting in Freud, for the reasons we have outlined. What appears as a metaphysical leap and discontinuity in Heidegger is what Freud had already conceived as One and Two, in the continuity/discontinuity of a mind that must first and foremost think its own body<sup>47</sup>.

With respect to the other two ‘representational’ functions or loci of the psyche, which we shall now proceed to analyse, this order of affect, or of the drive, may be defined as an order of neither *eidetic-perceptual nor linguistic* nature. Indeed, in the entirety of Freud’s work, drive-affect essentially lives according to the hydraulic logic of diffusion: that is, owing to its composition as purely quantitative energy, it moves and transforms along scales of decrease or increase that cannot be subjected to segmentation or discontinuous articulation. It is the locus of emotional energy, which Freud characterises as ‘free energy’, running freely and as rapidly as possible toward the satisfaction of pleasure or toward the precipitous flight from displeasure.

### 3.2 *Objektvorstellung und Wortvorstellung*

The other two components that contribute to shaping the Freudian *Vorstellung* are the *Objektvorstellung* (or thing-presentation), and the *Wortvorstellung* (or word-presentation), respectively. The definition and description of these two further representative functions had already been clarified by Freud, even before arriving at the theory of the drives and psychoanalysis, in a text from the period of his histological and physiological research, *Zur Auffassung der Aphasien. Eine kritische Studie*, published in Vienna in 1891<sup>48</sup>.

If the *Triebrepräsident* is structured around internal sense, the function Freud defines as «Objektvorstellung» or «Sachvorstellung» is instead the function of the mind structured upon the five external senses and capable of producing perceptual presentations of various kinds, with an eidetic-visual predominance. This type of representative function, based on sensory-perceptual material, is devoid of language: it produces rerepresentations or object-scenes without the presence of

47 On this topic, cf. Riccardo Lombardi, *Metà prigioniero, metà alato. La dissociazione corpo-mente in psicoanalisi*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2016.

48 *Zur Auffassung der Aphasien. Eine kritische Studie*, von Dr. Sigm. Freud, Privatdozent für Neuropathologie an der Universität Wien, Leipzig-Wien, Franz Deuticke, 1891; cf. a recent edition of the same text ed. by Paul Vogel, Fischer, Frankfurt a.M. 2001.

verbal representations and symbols. As Freud states in a text from his pre-psychoanalytic and neurological phase, *Zur Auffassung der Aphasien. Eine kritische Studie* (1891): «Die ObjectVorstellung selbst ist wiederum ein Associationscomplex aus den verschiedenartigsten visuellen, akustischen, taktilen, kinästhetischen und anderen Vorstellungen»<sup>49</sup>. That is, an associative complex in which the representation of the word is precisely what proves absent.

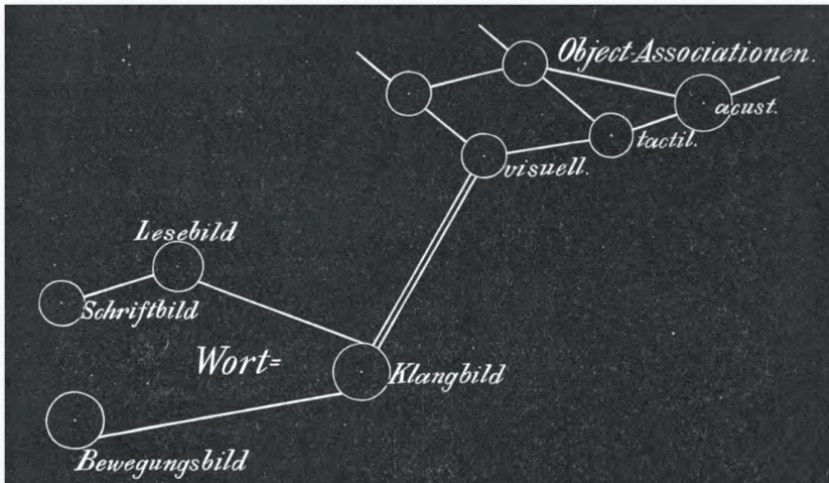
The *Sachvorstellung* is not, however, characterised only by the absence of language. It is also its being an ‘open’ representation, as Freud defines it. This means that the mind, in order to conceive the idea of the extra-mental existence of an object – that is, in order to represent the durable appearance and consistency of a thing – must not only perceive actual and effective sensations at a given moment (sensations which, moreover, are extremely fleeting and fragmentary), but must also be able to include within them the perception of a permanent possibility that in the future similar impressions will come to be associated in the same way, within the same associative chain. In this sense, the representation of the thing is ‘open’, as theorised by John Stuart Mill – whose *Logic* Freud cites<sup>50</sup> explicitly in his essay on aphasia – and according to whom the innumerable possibility of future sensations that will repeat the same association is more decisive in defining the existence of an object than the present sensations themselves.

The logic that constitutes the domain of thing-presentation, with its eidetic-visual predominance, is not the quantitative-diffusive logic of affect but rather that of the empirical-qualitative association of figures and sensory data – such as images, sounds, smells, tactile sensations – which relate to one another, associate, overlap with one another or separate and decompose through spatial-temporal continuity

49 *Ibid.*, p. 79-80.

50 In his text on aphasia, Freud cites only one philosopher, John Stuart Mill, referring to his two works *A System of Logic* and *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*. In the English philosopher's thought, Freud found the idea of a representational framework formed entirely within the body, along with the conviction that representation is not access to an external object in its materiality, but is a representation of an object only insofar as it constitutes an internal modification of corporeality. «There is not the slightest reason for believing that what we call the sensible qualities of the object [...] bear any affinity to its own nature. A cause does not, as such, resemble its effects; an east wind is not like the feeling of cold, nor heat like the steam of boiling water. Why then should matter resemble our sensations? [...] of the outward world, we know and can know absolutely nothing, except the sensations which we experience from it», John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic Ratiocinative and Inductive Being A Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation*, Longmans, London 1724, p. 39.

and contiguity, through analogies or discrepancies of form, through correspondences of colours, through degrees and intensities of sounds.



This image is taken from Sigmund Freud, *Zur Auffassung der Aphasien*.

### 3.3 Language Does Not Create Meaning

Lastly, the *Wortvorstellung* (or word-presentation), summarises the mind's linguistic-symbolic function. To Freud, each word-presentation – as he writes again in his early essay on aphasia – is also a complex representation made up of of four components: the *Klangbild* (sound image), which represents and brings the word to mind as a word heard; the *Lesebild* (visual image), which represents the word in the mind as a term read; the *Bewegungsbild* (motor image of phonation), which structures the word as a spoken word; and the *Schriftbild* (image of writing), which structures the word as a written word. Therefore, in Freud's view, the *Wortvorstellung* is a synthetic representation made up of of acoustic, visual and kinaesthetic elements. Yet it is fundamentally closed and defined (unlike the *Objektvorstellung*), because it is exhausted in its four essential psychic images, among which the auditory one is dominant.

This distinction or opposition between the closure of linguistic representation and the openness of a non-linguistic psychic content of meaning – processed and transformed within the psychoanalytic domain – will later lead, within the subsequent framework of psychoanalysis, to the fundamental distinction between «freie Energie» and «gebundene Energie» – that is, free energy and bound energy. What it is most important to emphasise here, however, is that for the

Freud of the aphasia studies the decisive synthesis – the synthesis of syntheses – is the one that connects word representation with object representation through the conjunction of the sound image of the former and the visual image of the latter, as he writes in the caption accompanying the figure reproduced above.

The word-presentation appears as a closed complex of representations, whereas the thing-presentation appears, by contrast, as an open complex. The word-presentation is not connected with the thing-presentation through all its components, but only through the sound image. Among the object associations, it is the visual ones that represent the object, in a manner analogous to that in which the sound image represents the word. *En passant*, no one will fail to notice how here, in the *Objektvorstellung*, Freud assigns the pre-eminent importance – among the various sensory components – to the visual dimension, almost in continuity with the same ancient tradition of Greek inspiration that attributed to sight the greatest capacity and authority for apprehending what possesses reality and truth. Yet, beyond this observation – which nevertheless acquires considerable significance in contemporary psychoanalytic research aimed at investigating a pre-representational psychic life – it is important to emphasise that, for this Freud of his neurological phase, the most delicate locus of the mind he is describing, in terms of possible pathological outcomes, is precisely the connection between linguistic representations and representations without language.

The different pathologies of aphasia that he considers here – auditory or *sensory aphasia*, as the inability to hear words; *motor aphasia*, as the inability to pronounce them; *reading aphasia*, as the inability to read them; and *writing aphasia*, as the inability to write them – confirm the following thesis for Freud:

The thesis that we must now formulate on the basis of the pathology of language disorders is that the word representation is connected, through its sensory termination (sound images), with the thing-presentation<sup>51</sup>.

In an equally important passage, Freud does not fail to underline that this connection – between the linguistic and the non-linguistic, between signifier and signified – is precisely what forms the most delicate axis, in terms of the possibility of interruption and dysfunction, in all aphasic pathologies: «denn Manches deutet darauf hin, dass die Verbindung von Wort- und Objectvorstellung der erschöpf barste Theil der Sprachleistung ist, gewissem assen ihr schwacher Punkt»<sup>52</sup>.

51 Freud, *Zur Auffassung der Aphasien, Eine kritische Studie, op. cit.*, p. 80.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

For Freud, the coexistence, mediation and synthesis of *Triebrepräsenz*, *Objektvorstellung* and *Wortvorstellung* – that is, the three psychic functions that together compose the overall activity of the psyche – represent the non-pathological functioning of the life of the mind in its relation to the body. The link between *affect*, *the representation of the scene of satisfaction or displeasure through which this affect is resolved, and their articulation in words through language* structures the form of thinking that Freud calls the «secondary process» – that is, the mind's capacity *to bind through language* the open energy which, in the «primary process», or unconscious form of thinking, flows freely towards its resolution.

For Freud, language – insofar as it consists of symbols that replace object-scenes and the affects that span them – basically produces an effect of cooling, an eclipse of *affects*<sup>53</sup> and of the drive-scenes animated by them. It does so in a kind of literal *Aufhebung* in the Hegelian sense, linking the thing-representation invested with affect to chains of words which, at the very moment they restrain its energy, simultaneously relativise it, precisely by taking distance from it through their capacity for symbolisation.

Thus, through word-presentation and the network of words to which it is structurally linked, the urgency of the primary process – which obeys only the pleasure-displeasure principle – is moderated and mitigated, and in place of the compulsive resolution of the drive there intervenes a beneficial cooling of the drives that allows one to look around, to bring the reality principle into play as well, and, through a thought that also takes the external world into account, to seek the most appropriate and least compelled satisfaction of affective tension – a satisfaction not merely imagined or hallucinatory, but concretely possible and real.

Thus, despite its irreplaceable function in psychoanalysis as a *talking cure* (therapy conducted not through drugs but through words), language *does not create meaning but brings it to light*: this is the peculiar and highly original thesis of the Freudian conception of language. *Meaning* – the ultimate meaning of experience – lies in the drive-emotional process and in the *Objektvorstellungen* that it spans and configures. Yet, for the psyche to be able to move from the primary mode of thinking and its obligation of immediate satisfaction, with discharge of emotional tension, to the secondary mode of a thinking confronted with the reality principle, language is necessary. Through its discursive chains *it mediates that immediacy*, bringing it into the light of reflective consciousness and thereby into its genuine possibility of satisfaction.

<sup>53</sup> On this topic, cf. Armando B. Ferrari, *L'eclissi del corpo. Una ipotesi psicoanalitica*, Borla, Roma 2004.

This crucial theme – the identification of language with consciousness – goes far beyond the initial Freudian treatment developed in the short book on aphasia and runs, because of its intrinsic importance, throughout Freud's entire work from beginning to end. In this sense it should be recalled that, as early as his 1895 manuscript of the *Entwurf einer Psychologie* (*Project for a Scientific Psychology*), Freud clearly held the conviction that the mnemonic image (here in the sense of *Sachvorstellung*) acquires the «mark of quality» (to use Freud's language of the *timetime*), peculiar and proper to *an activity of consciousness actually in operation*, only when it becomes associated with a verbal image. Verbal associations are the chains that restrain desire and that at the same time cast their net to establish possible connections with reality.

Thinking with the charge of the signs of thought-reality or of verbal signs is therefore the highest and most reliable form of the process of cognitive thought<sup>54</sup>.

For this Freud, poised midway between the physiological and the psychoanalytic, thought – far from being contemplation – represents action, whose necessity arises at the moment when, within the life of the mind, a distance or gap opens between inner psychic representation and reality. Healing this distance is the outcome of a genuine labour that employs as its instruments that specific type of representation constituted by verbal representations. Their intrinsically sonorous and light nature makes it possible to restrain and contain the motility of a body and of an action ready to follow the immediate demand of desire: thus to inhibit and cool emotional acceleration, using a quantity of energy smaller than that of the drive in order to investigate the surrounding world and ultimately achieve the coincidence between the psychic and the real through a judgement of identity.

Thus the process of thinking/judging is a process made possible only by the inhibition exercised by the ego and set in motion by the differences between the cathexis of desire attached to a memory and a similar perceptual cathexis. It follows that when the two charges coincide the consequence will be a biological signal to terminate thinking and allow discharge to begin. When they do not coincide, the activity of thought is intensified, and this activity will again come to an end when they coincide. The work of judgement unfolds through the motor image of words which, by suspending the energy of the discharge of desire and inhibiting the memories that facilitate it, directs attention to seek out and select, from perceptions

54 Sigmund Freud, *Entwurf einer Psychologie* (1895), in *Aus den Anfängen der Psychoanalyse*, hrsg. v. Marie Bonaparte – Anna Freud – Ernst Kris, Imago Publishing Co., London 1950, p. 371-478: 380.

that come from the external world, all the possible connections and pathways of conduction that progressively lead towards the object sought. Attention thus becomes an active and intentional expenditure of energy that preselects and preinvests that portion of reality and of the external world from which the original image of desire may plausibly re-emerge and reproduce itself, this time connected with a sensation-perception. Verbal associations are therefore the chains that restrain desire and that, at the same time, cast their net in order to establish possible connections with reality.

Again, in that fundamental text of his maturity entitled *Das Unbewusste* (1915), Freud theorises very clearly «die bewußte Vorstellung umfaßt die Sachvorstellung plus der zugehörigen Wortvorstellung, die unbewußte ist die Sachvorstellung allein»<sup>55</sup>.

This distinction, which assigns to the unconscious a mode of thinking that proceeds through a composing and a discourse that traverse paths and connections only among *Objektvorstellungen* (obviously linked to drive forces), and *therefore lacking linguistic discursivity*, is reaffirmed once more in a passage contained in *The Ego and the Id* (1923):

An einer anderen Stelle? habe ich schon die Annahme gemacht, daß der wirkliche Unterschied einer *ubw* von einer *vbw* Vorstellung (einem Gedanken) darin besteht, daß die erstere sich an irgendwelchem Material, das unerkant bleibt, vollzieht, während bei der letzteren (der *vbw*) die Verbindung mit *Wortvorstellungen* hinzukommt. [...] Die Frage: Wie wird etwas bewußt? lautet also zweckmäßiger: Wie wird etwas vorbewußt? Und die Antwort wäre: durch Verbindung mit den entsprechenden Wortvorstellungen<sup>56</sup>.

And again, in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1938), which can be considered his final complete work, Freud does not change his mind in this matter, writing:

Bewusste Vorgänge an der Peripherie des Ichs, alle anderen im Ich unbewusst, das wäre der einfachste Sachverhalt, den wir anzunehmen hätten. So mag es sich auch wirklich bei den Tieren verhalten, beim Menschen kommt eine Komplikation hinzu, durch welche auch innere Vorgänge im Ich die Qualität des Bewusstseins erwerben können. Dies ist das Werk der Sprachfunktion, die Inhalte des Ichs mit Erinnerungsresten der visuellen, besonders aber akustischen Wahrnehmungen in feste Verbindung bringt<sup>57</sup>.

55 Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbewusste* (1915), in Id., *Werke. Studienausgabe*, Bd. III: *Psychologie des Unbewußten*, *op. cit.*, p. 117-167: 160.

56 Sigmund Freud, *Das Ich und das Es* (1923), in *ibid.*, p. 273-330: 289.

57 Sigmund Freud, *Abriß der Psychoanalyse* (1938), in Id., *Gesammelte Werke*, hrsg. v. Anna Freud – Eduard Bibring – Willi Hoffer – Ernst Kris – Otto Isakower, Imago

### 3.4 *Dreams As Thought Without Language*

The disintegration of this psychic system, based on the coexistence of the three orders discussed so far – above all the dissolution of the connection between word representation and thing representation – opens for Freud the path to the science of the unconscious through, as is well known, that keystone which is *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and from there to the pathologies of the mind. In my view, the science of the unconscious in the whole Freudian framework rests on the fundamental conviction that the unconscious is essentially without language: that is, it is a place and a mode of representing and thinking in which the linguistic function, the *Wortvorstellung*, is substantially absent, and in which only the *Trie-brepräsentant* and the *Sachvorstellung* are present.

According to Freud's classical and well-known definition, the dream is the fulfilment of a wish through hallucination: a suspension of the reality principle and of consciousness directed towards external reality, and the rule of the pleasure principle alone. The suspension of waking consciousness directed outwards implies that the representative and thinking activity of dreaming takes place through a 'regression', that is, through the hallucinatory reactivation of past images and perceptions. In dreams, Freud writes, with regression every «complex act of representation» is disarticulated and reduced to the «raw material of mnemonic traces». This return to the raw material of representation implies that dream-thought is formed through what Freud calls *Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit*, 'regard for representability': that is, the capacity to stage only images – predominantly visual ones – or in any case concrete representations and sensations of things, while simultaneously eliminating every note of abstraction in the sense of the generalisation and universalisation implicit in the symbolic value of linguistic signs. «Wir heißen es Regression, wenn sich im Traum die Vorstellung in das sinnliche Bild rückverwandelt, aus dem sie irgendeinmal hervorgegangen ist»<sup>58</sup>.

Therefore, Freud's thesis is that with the activity of dreaming, thought capable of conceptualisation and discursivity – that is, capable of associating through verbal symbols – is replaced by an associative system composed of images and sensory perceptions. Thus the primary process – that is, the mode of functioning of the mind which for Freud is compelled and constrained by obedience to the pleasure

Publishing, London 1941, Bd. 17: *Schriften aus dem Nachlass. 1892-1938*, p. 63-121: 84.

<sup>58</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (1900), in Id., *Werke. Studienausgabe, op. cit.*, Bd. II, p. 519.

principle and by the satisfaction of affect at any cost – as it manifests itself in dreams appears curved and enclosed within a fundamentally perceptual-sensory horizon, dominated by visual representation. This implies that this peculiar type of ‘thought’ employs peculiar methods (in the etymological sense of paths) of association and construction, and excludes from itself the presence of more generalising and abstract methods and connections.

Wenn wir den Traumvorgang als eine Regression innerhalb des von uns angenommenen seelischen Apparats ansehen, so erklärt sich uns ohne weiteres die empirisch festgestellte Tatsache, daß alle Denkrelationen der Traumgedanken bei der bei der Traumarbeit verlorggegangen oder nur mühseligen Ausdruck finden [...]. Diese Denkrelationen sind nach unserem Schema nicht in den ersten *Er*-Systemen, sondern in weiter nach vorn liegenden enthalten und müssen bei der Regression bis auf die Wahrnehmungsbilder ihren Ausdruck einbüßen. *Das Gefüge der Traumgedanken wird bei der Regression in sein Rohmaterial aufgelöst*<sup>59</sup>.

The relations of the *logos* – that is, of the thought that *binds* and gathers through language – fall away, leaving behind content that must be bound and composed otherwise. «Der Inhalt der Traumgedanken ist durch das scheinbare Denken des Traumes wiedergegeben, nicht die Beziehung der Traumgedanken zueinander, in deren Feststellung das Denken besteht»<sup>60</sup>.

This absence of *logos* represents the foundation of the alogical – but not illogical – nature of the dream-work and of its two fundamental functions that contribute to producing the hieroglyphic writing of the dream, namely ‘condensation’ and ‘displacement’ (*Verdichtung* and *Verschiebung*). The first, as is well known, unites several representational and mental contents according to a mode of superimposition and juxtaposition that is not that of generalisation and conceptual abstraction, and which instead seems to operate primarily through a logic of similarity; the second proceeds along associative chains that appear to privilege the dimension of contiguity.

In short, in my view the unconscious part of the mind appears, for Freud, to feature an absence of language, in the sense of the absence of a discursive connection among its contents. Indeed, even language itself, when it is present, seems for Freud to appear only in the terms of a representational scenography which treats verbal signifiers as if they were thing-representations, and which therefore treats words – or

59 *Ibid.*

60 *Ibid.*, p. 311 (italics by Freud).

the individual word – according to associative rules and meanings that are entirely heterogeneous with respect to the semantic-syntagmatic chains of language in the proper sense.

Soviel von Rede und Gegenrede in den Träumen vorkommen mag, die an sich sinnig oder unvernünftig sein können, die Analyse zeigt uns jedesmal, daß der Traum dabei nur Bruchstücke von wirklich geführten oder gehörten Reden dem Traumgedanken entnommen hat und höchst willkürlich mit ihnen verfahren ist. Er hat sie nicht nur aus ihrem Zusammenhange gerissen und zerstückt, das eine Stück aufgenommen, das andere verworfen, sondern auch oft neu zusammengefügt, so daß die zusammenhängend scheinende Traumrede bei der Analyse in drei oder vier Brocken zerfällt. Bei dieser Neuverwendung hat er oft den Sinn, den die Worte in den Traumgedanken hatten, beiseite gelassen und dem Wortlaut einen völlig neuen Sinn abgewonnen<sup>61</sup>.

*Condensation and displacement* act not only upon visual, but also upon sound representations. Indeed, every sensory image – in its dissolution from all conceptual levels and in its specific dominance and origins – represents apt and potential content for the synthesis of the unconscious.

Am greifbarsten wird die Verdichtungsarbeit des Traums, wenn sie Worte und Namen zu ihren Objekten gewählt hat. Worte werden vom Traum überhaupt häufig wie Dinge behandelt und erfahren dann dieselben Zusammensetzungen wie die Dingvorstellungen. Komische und seltsame Wortschöpfungen sind das Ergebnis solcher Träume<sup>62</sup>.

As a result – and this is one of the most decisive observations for affirming the existence of another logic and another mode of mental functioning compared to those of linguistic thought – for Freud the principle of non-contradiction has a limited validity that cannot be extended to the unconscious activity of the mind. For here, precisely through the workings of condensation and displacement, it is possible for two contraries – or, if one prefers, two ideational chains of opposite meaning – to be present simultaneously within the same image and within the same unit of time. The principle of non-contradiction, that is, the principle that forbids contradiction, is, as is well known, the foundation of discursive thinking and of Western logic, both of ancient Aristotelian logic and of modern mathematical logic. Yet for Freud logic does not account for the whole of mental activity; it

61 *Ibid.*, p. 406-407.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 297.

does not explain, nor is it able to comprehend, a large portion of the behaviours, actions, and thoughts of human beings. Against the claim of logic to exhaustiveness – its pretension to analyse and resolve the entirety of human experience by means of its formulas – Freud sets the three logics of his theory of the mind: the diffusive logic of affect, the associative-sensory logic of unconscious thought, and the discursive logic of logical-linguistic thought. In doing so he advances a theory of the embodiment of meaning, according to which the ultimate sense of every occurrence and every act of interpretation lies – beyond the information that comes to us from the external world – in the inner emotional response of each of us, a response that originates in a body – note well, I say body and not brain – that can never be reduced to the mind. The body's being a source of meanings lies precisely in the distance that structurally and functionally both makes it present to the mind and at the same time separates it from it. For it is precisely the difference between mind and body, with the irreducibility of its two poles, that makes us live and function as human beings.

In conclusion, in these reflections – schematic though they are – on Freud, I would stress that my aim has been to present Freud as a theorist, and not merely a clinician, of integration: that is, of a conception of the human mind as composed of different levels and logics of functioning. It is therefore crucial that these three different logics be integrated with one another, without any one of them falling into an asymmetric taking to extremes in relation to the others. From this point of view Freudianism refers back to the best tradition of classical German philosophy, which in Kant and Hegel finds its highest enhancements of mediation and synthesis—processes within which alterity and opposition are immanent, yet which nonetheless do not abandon the attempt to sustain a theory of organic individuality.

In contrast to this tradition, peculiar to German culture, the French reworking of psychoanalysis – essentially due to the work of Jacques Lacan – has celebrated an anthropology of division and of lack-of-being that has drawn, in my view, heavily on Vladimir Solov'ëv's metaphysics of the 'Nothing' and on Heidegger's ontological difference, mediated through the lectures and celebrated seminars of Alexandre Kojève.

The transplantation that Lacan sought to perform – that of a metaphysics of Non-Being into the body of Freud's work, which in its genesis was instead *characterized by a profound biological-Darwinian inspiration* – should, in my opinion, be unmasked (though this is not the place) as a highly skillful gamble that attempted to connect visions of the world and of human life not only distant from one another but altogether irreducible one to the other.

Lacan's great manipulative and theatrical capacity lay precisely in placing himself on the border between two universes, two *Weltanschauungen* that could not speak to one another, given the non-comparability of their theoretical and onto-anthropological principles, and in instead inventing a lexicon – entirely his own and idiosyncratic – by means of which he purported to make kingdoms, national traditions, and cultures otherwise closed and mutually hostile enter into dialogue. At the same time he kept firmly in his own hands the keys to that code, so hermetic and personal, while entrusting to the posterity of his followers the task of an endless hermeneutics of that *secretum*.

In this regard, one must consider the profoundly different way in which the mind–body relation is read from a Lacanian perspective as opposed to an interpretation inspired by Freud. For Lacan, beginning with his earliest writings, the body is the locus of Non-Sense, of Non-Being. It coincides with a Real that is *corps morcelé*, primordial chaos, the overflowing of drives, the excess of a life that, precisely because it exceeds itself, is immediately death. Such a Real is the absolute *Other* with respect to the human, because it is bare life that devastates and bursts into human life; and as *bare life* it is devoid of any possible meaning or mediation with the human. It is a founding lack and split, because, being a life that can never be realized in human life, it posits the absolutely *Other* at the heart of the human as a foundation that can never be attained or signified. It is a permanent condition of dissolution and fragmentation which, through the act of a first and original *après coup*, produces the nostalgia for an *Origin*, for a *One* (which never existed but is only fantasized): such as might be, prior to birth, a fusional indistinct nature with the maternal, which as such would once again imply a state only of death and of the annihilation of the individual.

Starting from this displacement of the body – laden with needs – into a bestial naturalness that is *Other* with respect to the human, the human psyche structures itself according to cultural functions (the Imaginary or the Symbolic) that attempt to confer meaning, to confer Being upon this Non-being, upon this non-sense. Yet they do so through figurations and constructions (Imaginary and Symbolic) that always remain extrinsic to and excessive with respect to this original Non-Sense, which at once constitutes the limit and the abyss of existence. For Jacques Lacan the human being is thus constituted and lived through a structural alternation: between a *less-than-being* and a *more-than-being*, between a radical absence of meaning and an excess of meaning, since the mirror identifications of the Imaginary and the codes and laws of the linguistic Symbolic can only revolve around the margin of that originary and abysmal *beance*, without ever being able

to access it or give it meaning<sup>63</sup>. In other words, the human being, by virtue of this pulsation between lack-of-being and the semiotic operation upon that lack, is intrinsically symbolic, as the nature of language would have it: a sign that constantly refers to something other than itself. Hence the most famous thesis of Lacan's reinterpretation of psychoanalysis, according to which the unconscious is structured like a language – that is, the unconscious functions according to rules and structures similar to those of language.

All this, however, follows from the fact that the French psychoanalyst initially adopted the ontological distinction, proposed by Kojève, between need and desire, between animal nature and the historical-social mind, between the biological-physical drive (as desire for an object) and the desire for the desire of the Other (as the desire for recognition). The result, in my view, is a return to a Cartesian dualism between body and mind, grounded in the ontological and qualitative heterogeneity of these two domains. But this is a matter that it will be appropriate to discuss in greater depth on another occasion<sup>64</sup>.

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Here, at the end of this rapid and rather schematic overview, what I wish to emphasise is that it is difficult to conceive models of social reorganization and new political frameworks without including the proposal of a new anthropology – one grounded in the interior recognition by a mind of its own emotional corporeality. The anthropological deficit of a Marxism that remains anchored to the Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach can, I believe, only be overcome through a vision of the human being constructed not solely along the *horizontal axis* of recognition or non-recognition with others, but also – and indispensably – along the *vertical axis* of one's own interiority and access, *with the minimal possible degree of self-censorship*, to one's own biological-affective ground. Without embracing the fundamental thesis of psychoanalysis, according to which, in addition to the traditional external society, there exists within the human being an interior society – subject, in turn, either to democratic equilibrium or to authoritarianism – *without the adoption of this anthropology of the two axes*, I do not believe that a new historical and cultural process of individual and collective emancipation can take place.

63 Cf. Davide Tarizzo, *Introduzione a Lacan*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2009, especially p. 31-55.

64 Here, I again reference my own work, *Dio ci guarda/(i) dall'Uno. Note per una critica affrettata del lacanismo*, in «InCircolo. Rivista di filosofia e cultura», 7 (2019), p. 144-160.