Thinking in Relation to Method: Metaphilosophical Reflections on Philosophy's Orientation to Methodology

Morgan Elbot

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THINKING IN RELATION TO METHOD:
METAPHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS ON PHILOSOPHY’S ORIENTATION TO
METHODOLOGY

by

Morgan Elbot

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It is impossible to overemphasize just how much of this project is truly the product of so many different people, shared over expanses of space and time. If there is an element that was left under-emphasized in this dissertation, it is my deep belief that thinking only happens with others. It is fundamentally linked to a social world and I have been lucky to find myself amidst so many incredible worlds of thinkers.

Foremost among such worlds is the Philosophy Department at the University of Memphis, where I had the honor of thinking with, through and amongst so many careful and caring thinkers. I first want to thank my committee, Dr. Michael Monahan, Dr. Mary Beth Mader, Dr. Lewis Gordon and Dr. Daniel Smith, who trusted me to pursue this unusual project and supported me throughout its many iterations. I am especially grateful to Mike, my advisor, not only for his invaluable feedback on the many versions of each chapter, but also for his patience and encouragement when the obstacles to continue writing seemed almost too great to overcome.

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laughed, cried and shared in the many mysteries, joys and pains of living in this world; Tailer Ransom, Jim Zubko and Ben Curtis, who welcomed me into the department, enveloping me in a way that left an indelible imprint on my sense of what it means to do philosophy, exemplifying the various tempos, rhythms and pulses of thinking; Bernardo Alba, whose quiet wisdom embodies the virtues of a genuine thinker who always sees the human “in” the thought; Dan Larkin and John Torrey, who demonstrate what it means to care for a department through acts of service that embrace all, especially those hesitating and lingering at the sidelines; Jasper St. Bernard and Julian Rome, who each exemplify the ways in which the life of thought can be pursued with both an incisive critical lens and a curiosity that is neither jaded nor naïve, a balance few are able to achieve.

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possible; he is an educator who exemplifies the ideals of academic mentorship and scholarly virtues. The second is Dr. Bernie Rollin, my M.A. advisor at Colorado State University, who, as I struggled to find a suitable thesis topic, asked me the most important question: “What keeps you up at night?” Your legacy lives on through the millions of animals whose suffering you have alleviated.

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Abstract

This portfolio style dissertation examines the relationship between philosophy and method from distinct traditions in continental philosophy. The first chapter presents an exegetical analysis of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s metaphilosophical account of concept creation and Deleuze’s critique of method in the context of the dogmatic image of thought. The analysis explores the various facets and theoretical influences of his critique in order to elucidate the parameters of his rejection of method as part of the creative activity that defines philosophical practice. Through identifying exceptions that qualify the extent of his critique, the chapter concludes by calling for a new image of method—akin to the new image of thought Deleuze found in Nietzsche—that is neither constrained by the Cartesianism Deleuze associates with method nor modeled on the sciences; a philosophical conception of method that accords with the specific nature of philosophical inquiry.

The subsequent chapters can be understood as responding to this challenge, endeavoring to reconceive method and philosophy’s relation to it. The second chapter approaches this task from the broadest scope, addressing the question—"what is method?"—by distinguishing between two conceptions of method: procedural and relational. In comparing the circularities of each conception’s meta-methodological analysis, I argue that the reflexivity of the relational conception of method makes it a better suited framework for philosophical inquiry. The latter portion of the chapter develops this argument by demonstrating how the methodological openness of the relational conception of method can be cultivated through a practice of philosophical questioning that is immanent, incomplete and reflexive.

The final chapter presents a phenomenological account of method that is grounded in its spatial and temporal dimensions, highlighting the significance of such contextual features in
examining philosophy’s methodological orientation to its objects of study. The chapter is structured around the phenomenological analyses of Sara Ahmed and Alia Al-Saji, developing a phenomenology of method through a comparative analysis with their accounts of orientation and racializing vision. In synthesizing the insights that emerge in the course of identifying the spatial and temporal dimensions of method, I conclude by positing a praxis of hesitant-disorientation that seeks to foreground the contextual features and histories of methods in an effort to reimagine philosophy’s relation to its own methodological orientations.
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**CHAPTER 1**

**CONCEPT CREATION AND DELEUZE’S CRITIQUE OF METHOD**

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Introduction

I do not believe that there is a transparency possible in method. Nor that philosophy might be possible as transparency. Those who have worked on methodology all their lives have written many books that replace the more interesting books that they could have written. So much the worse for the philosophy that would walk in sunlight without shadows.

—Emmanuel Levinas, God Who Comes to Mind

This dissertation aims to investigate philosophy’s relation to method, exploring conceptions of method congruent with the reflexive nature of philosophical practice. Examining the role of method in philosophy is, in a simple sense, to reflect on the question: what are we doing when we do this “thing” called philosophy? In responding to this question, I contend that the activity of philosophical reflection includes reflexively inquiring into the nature of that activity. Why, one might ask, must philosophy engage in philosophical self-reflection concerning its own practices and relation to methodology? Are there not, as Levinas suggests, more interesting topics to write on than method? While I leave it up to the reader to decide whether or not the following examination of method is an exception to Levinas’s assessment, I do hope to have provided compelling reasons concerning the significance and perhaps even necessity of metaphilosophical reflection. When philosophy neglects this reflexive element of its practice, it risks failing to examine the conditions of inquiry, which encompasses the conditions of its own inquiry. The potential for philosophy to think otherwise is undermined by rigid and fixed forms of thought that resist reflecting on the activity of thinking. For philosophy to avoid cleaning and scraping the “bones” of “ready-made concepts,” as Deleuze warns, or for it to be disorientated by
“the strangeness of familiar objects,” as Ahmed advises, it must maintain a dynamic and critically reflexive encounter with its own practice and, therefore, its relation to method.¹

This portfolio-style dissertation comprises three chapters, each examining the concept of method through various traditions in continental philosophy and from distinct points of entry. Despite the disparate frameworks of each analysis, there are a number of recurring themes that are woven throughout the chapters. A brief summary of the central arguments of each chapter will serve to contextualize these shared features. The first chapter presents an exegetical analysis of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s metaphilosophical account of concept creation and Deleuze’s critique of method, exploring the parameters of his rejection of a philosophical methodology in light of his conception of the dogmatic image of thought. A pivotal issue throughout the chapter is Deleuze’s account of the conditions of learning and the contingency of encountering that which forces thought to think, factors that contribute to his objections to method as part of the creative activity that defines philosophical practice. Through identifying exceptions to Deleuze’s rejection of method that qualify its scope, the chapter concludes by calling for a new image of method—akin to the new image of thought Deleuze found in Nietzsche—that is neither constrained by the Cartesianism Deleuze identifies with method nor modeled on the sciences; a philosophical conception of method that accords with the specific nature of philosophical inquiry.

The two chapters that follow can be seen as responses to this challenge, with each endeavoring to reconceive of method and philosophy’s relation to it. The second chapter approaches this task from the broadest scope, addressing the question—“what is method?”—by distinguishing between two conceptions of method: the procedural and the relational. In

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 83; Sara Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 164.
comparing the circularities of each conception’s meta-methodological analysis, I argue that the reflexivity of the relational conception of method is better suited for philosophical inquiry. The latter portion of the chapter develops this argument by demonstrating how the methodological openness of the relational conception of method can be cultivated through a practice of philosophical questioning that is immanent, incomplete and reflexive. The final chapter presents a phenomenological account of method that is grounded in its spatial and temporal dimensions, highlighting the significance of such contextual features in examining philosophy’s methodological orientation to its objects of study. The chapter is structured around the phenomenological analyses of Sara Ahmed and Alia Al-Saji, developing a phenomenology of method through a comparative analysis with their accounts of orientation and racializing vision. In synthesizing the insights that emerge in the course of identifying the spatial and temporal dimensions of method, I conclude by positing a praxis of hesitant-disorientation that seeks to foreground the contextual features and histories of methods in an effort to reimagine how philosophy might relate to its own methodological practices.

A prominent theme that emerges in the analysis of each chapter is the idea of immanent reflexivity as fundamental to the practice of philosophy. This is a pivotal claim in the argument presented in the second chapter, which develops an account of both method and philosophical thinking that emphasizes the inherent reflexivity that informs their relation. Moreover, the significance of reflexivity also has a performative import on account of the conception of “meta” I posit for my own metaphilosophical analysis, which does not reflect on the practices of philosophy as if from “above” or “outside” but is, rather, immanent to the philosophical practice on which it reflects, an issue further explored through Althusser’s metaphilosophical account. While the notion of reflexivity is touched on in the first chapter in terms of Deleuze’s
characterization of experimentation as thought turning back on itself, the issue of immanence is central to not only the specific conception of the concept that Deleuze posits, but also to the conceptual framework of his larger theoretical project. The issue of immanent reflexivity emerges in the third chapter in response to the need to account for the mutually constituting dynamic between method and its objects of study, as illustrated through Ahmed’s distinction between being orientated around versus orientated toward.

Another common feature that appears near the beginning of each chapter is the notion that philosophy’s relation to method should not be modeled on the sciences. This demarcation between the manner in which philosophy and the sciences engage with their respective methodological orientations constitutes one of the primary reasons offered in support of the relational conception of method developed in the second chapter. The phenomenological analysis of method in the third chapter revisits an aspect of this argument in terms of the particular nature of philosophy’s objects of study, which, unlike the object domain of the sciences, are not predetermined or ready-made but, rather, are constituted in and by the process of philosophical inquiry. In fact, the idea that philosophy’s objects of study do not pre-exist philosophical reflection but are formed or actively created in the practice of philosophy is itself a reoccurring issue, evident in both Deleuze and Guattari’s account of concept creation as well as the relational conception of method’s account of the mutually constitutive relation between methods and their objects of study.

The distinction between philosophy and the sciences emerges in the first chapter in the context of both Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of philosophical experimentation, as well as their concept of the concept. In elucidating Deleuze’s experimental style of doing philosophy, I highlight a possible misinterpretation of his notion of experimentation, differentiating it from
other philosophical traditions that sought to align philosophy with the sciences. Experimentation, for Deleuze, indicates the ways through which one navigates a problem by responding to the various components—signs and singularities—that must be assembled in order to address the particularity of the problem. Moreover, in their account of concept creation—an activity which delineates the problematic field that pertains solely to philosophy—Deleuze and Guattari distinguish their own account of the concept from alternatives, rejecting these on the basis that they either subsumed the concept’s philosophical reality under the scientific reality of the function or they over-extended the reach of the concept, infringing on the domains of the arts and sciences.

A related, yet perhaps more subtle theme of the dissertation is a critical evaluation of reductive approaches to method that prioritize formal abstraction. The second chapter most explicitly addresses this issue in reference to various critiques that identify moments in the history of philosophy in which its commitment to reductive methodological frameworks resulted in its complicity in maintaining mechanisms of oppression, domination and control. In the same chapter, moreover, the formal abstraction that defines the procedural conception of method is shown to precipitate in the vicious circularity of its meta-methodological self-analysis. The issue of formal abstraction is indirectly raised in the phenomenology chapter with regards to the reductive nature of racializing vision and its analogue of methodological dogmatism, which obscures the historical, social, and material dimensions of method, perpetuating an incomplete understanding of philosophical practice. In the first chapter, Deleuze’s critique of the dogmatic image of thought can be framed in terms of objecting to the reductive image it presents of thinking, minimizing the difficulty that is a “de jure structure of thought” by presuming it to be the natural exercise of a faculty.
A final common feature of the arguments presented in each chapter is an emphasis on the significance of contextual contingencies for philosophical thinking and its relation to methodology. This issue is most clearly exemplified in Deleuze’s Nietzschean account of thinking as requiring a paideia or atmosphere, conditioning thought on the contingency of encountering the signs and singularities that force us to think. While Deleuze’s account of thinking leads him to reject method on the basis that it presupposes a conception of thinking as a voluntary act, the account of method presented in the phenomenology chapter could be seen as mitigating Deleuze’s rejection by calling attention to the contextual contingencies of method in terms of its spatial and temporal dimensions. By highlighting features like a method’s positionality and history, the notion of timeless and placeless thought—which Deleuze associates with thinking according to a method—is undermined. Furthermore, by positing an understanding of thinking which is conditioned on its relation to a social world, the discussion in the second chapter on Lewis Gordon’s analysis of Paget Henry’s approach to the sociology of philosophy underscores the social context in which philosophical thinking is grounded.

While the arguments of each chapter are intended to be evaluated on their own terms, they should also be read as being in conversation with each other in exploring the dynamic relationship between the practice of philosophy and the methodological frameworks that guide it. The overarching concern that drives the discussion within and among the chapters is the need for philosophy to reflexively engage with its relation to methodology, interrogating the conditions of its own inquiry, the failure of which limits its ability to encounter the strange, the unexpected, or the alien. Thus, in echoing Levinas's sentiment, this project does not seek to bring philosophy’s relation to method into the glaring “sunlight” of definitive clarity, but to acknowledge and
navigate the “shadows” that surround and give shape to the methodological orientations of philosophical practice.
Chapter 1

Concept Creation and Deleuze’s Critique of Method

If thought searches, it is less in the manner of someone who possess a method than that of a dog that seems to be making uncoordinated leaps.

—Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?

Introduction

Metaphilosophy has historically dedicated attention to questions concerning methodology, particularly within the subfield of philosophical methodology, which presents descriptive and normative accounts of the diverse methods employed in the course of philosophical inquiry.\(^1\) However, analyses on the methods of philosophy is often predicated on the assumption that philosophy \textit{ought} to have a relation to method—that method is a necessary feature of philosophical reflection—with responses primarily geared toward evaluating the nature of this relation. Implicit in this assumption lies a more fundamental, unasked question: does, or indeed should, method have a role in the practice of philosophy?

This question forms a central theme in the postmodern tradition, particularly contemporary French philosophy during the second half of the 20\(^{th}\) century. This tradition contested the presumption of philosophical methodology, offering critiques and, in certain instances, outright repudiations of the notion that philosophy adheres to a prescribed set of methods or operates according to various methodological orientations. Among the prominent figures critiquing method within the postmodern tradition is Gilles Deleuze, whose corpus

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consistently challenges the concept of a “methodical” understanding of philosophical practice, rejecting the assumption that method is necessary to thinking philosophically. On the contrary, Deleuze contends that method serves as one of thought’s “ways of being inactive,” fostering the illusion that through method thinking can “ward off error.” Such passivity arises as a consequence of the formal abstraction ostensibly inherent in method, such that “time and place matter little if we apply method: it enables us to enter the domain of that which is valid for all times and places.” Method, as a result, hastens the threat of complacency, of thinking “without overthrowing established feelings,” of thought “taking the bait,” so to speak, by assuming that it never has to call itself into question so long as it has method—and the good will of the thinker—to guide it toward truth.

Deleuze’s critique of method finds its most pronounced expression in his exposition of the dogmatic image of thought in *Difference and Repetition*. Accordingly, a central question I explore in the analysis concerns whether this conception of method—and its subsequent rejection as part of the creative activity that defines the practice of philosophy—is generalizable beyond Deleuze’s critique of the dogmatic image of thought.

Following Deleuze and Guattari’s claim that thought proceeds like the “uncoordinated leaps” of a dog, I arrive at the answer to this question circuitously, waiting for the question’s “occasions and circumstances” to be determined through a “taste” for the yet-to-be-determined. It is in this same spirit, in accordance with philosophy’s “perpetual state of digression,” that the

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3 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 103.


excursive trajectory of the analysis begins by first exploring Deleuze’s characterization of his style of philosophy as one of experimentation, which serves to introduce the central themes revisited throughout the analysis.\textsuperscript{6} Subsequently, proceeding from this broader contextualization, I present an exegetical exposition on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the concept. I first distinguish their account of the concept from alternatives by elucidating their stated aim of conducting “a pedagogy of the concept.”\textsuperscript{7} This is followed by a detailed elucidation of the defining characteristics of the concept.

Given this exposition of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the concept, the question of method begins to emerge, initially within the context of the activity of concept creation, which involves laying out a plane of immanence as part of what Deleuze calls “constructivism,” with the plane of immanence described as philosophy’s image of thought.\textsuperscript{8} Subsequently, this discussion leads to Deleuze’s critique of the dogmatic image of thought, with particular emphasis on the seventh and eighth postulates. These postulates serve as the foundation for Deleuze’s critique of method in terms of the conditions for “engendering the act of thinking within thought itself.”\textsuperscript{9} I explore these conditions through the influence of Nietzsche and Proust on Deleuze’s critique of method, thereby facilitating a more nuanced understanding of his critique, which is premised upon the constraints of culture and the contingency and involuntary nature of thinking. Through delineating the potential restriction of Deleuze’s critique of method to the dogmatic image of thought, I proceed to expound Deleuze and Guattari’s account of coadaptation as a

\textsuperscript{6} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 23.

\textsuperscript{7} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 12.

\textsuperscript{8} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 35.

philosophical faculty or taste. Given the opening created for an understanding of method that is
grounded in spatiotemporal questions—as opposed to the metaphysical question, “what is x?”—I
conclude by calling for a new image of method, drawing inspiration from the new images of
thought Deleuze found in Nietzsche and his method of dramatization.

A Style of Experimentation

Deleuze’s general style of philosophy—how he approaches thinking philosophically—
demonstrates an attention to and exemplification of the immanent reflexivity of philosophical
thinking.10 This Deleuzian style of thought is evident, for instance, in the way he engages with
the works of other philosophers. From Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant, Nietzsche, and Bergson, to name
a few, the primary aim of Deleuze’s engagement with these various figures of philosophy is not
to “figure out” what they “really meant” through an elucidation of their ideas. Rather, Deleuze’s
engagement with the ideas of other philosophers exhibits his characteristic style of
experimentation. Deleuze is, in this sense, leading by example, showing how philosophers
should not be “content to brandish ready-made old concepts like skeletons intended to intimidate
any creation…to clean and scrape bones like the critic and historian of our time.”11 As Deleuze
demonstrates through his experimentation style of philosophy, the philosopher must instead
“undertake to awaken a dormant concept and to play it again on a new stage, even if this comes
at the price of turning it against itself.”12 Deleuze does not treat other philosophers’ concepts like

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10 Deleuze discusses the notion of style in relation to Foucault’s concept of “styles of life,” stating: “style, in a great
writer, is always a style of life too, not anything at all personal, but inventing a possibility of life, a way of existing.
It’s strange how people sometimes say that philosophers have no style, or that they write badly. It can only be
because they don’t read them.” Negotiations, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995),
100. For further commentary on Deleuze’s notion of style, see: Ronald Bogue, “Deleuze’s Style,” Man and World
29, no. 3 (July 1996): 251-268.

11 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 83.

12 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 83.
museum pieces to be preserved and handled with a deferential fidelity. Doing so would amount to cleaning the bones of skeletal concepts and would, more importantly, belie the dynamic reflexivity of engaging with a text in which one must ask: what is the text doing to me and what am I doing to it? What can it become? How is it generative?

Deleuze and Guattari in fact directly link experimentation and philosophy, describing experimentation as “always that which is in the process of coming about—the new, remarkable, and interesting…It is philosophical.”13 Given the more common association of experimentation with the sciences, it is important to dismiss the possible misconception of Deleuze and Guattari’s account of philosophy as being in line with one of the prominent developments in the history of philosophy that seeks to secure or otherwise link philosophy to the sciences. Strands of this tendency can be found in the modern philosophical tradition, with a priority given to developing a theory of knowledge as the foundation on which the sciences can stably rest.14 But it is really in the early 20th century that this tendency becomes more dominant within the analytic tradition and the influence of logical positivism’s aspirations to devise a scientific philosophy in the Anglophone philosophical tradition in the decades that follow. This effort to align philosophy with the sciences, however, is certainly not the course that Deleuze and Guattari follow, as we will see in their account of the concept, which they distinguish from Frege and Russell’s understanding of concepts as propositional functions. For Deleuze and Guattari, the purpose of philosophical experimentation is not to facilitate, ground or necessarily contribute to the

13 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 111.

14 This is exemplified, for instance, in Descartes’s image of philosophy as being “like a tree,” explaining: “The roots are Metaphysics, the trunk is Physics, and the branches emerging from this trunk are all the other branches of knowledge. These branches can be reduced to three principal ones, namely Medicine, Mechanics and Ethics.” Principles of Philosophy, trans. Valentine Roger Miller and Reese P. Miller, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1982), xxiv).
sciencias, which have their own object domain of creating functions as propositions in discursive systems.

Experimentation, as explained and exemplified by Deleuze and Guattari, indicates the ways through which one navigates a problem by responding to the singularities and signs that must be assembled, such that they consist or resonate together to address the particularity of the problem confronted.\textsuperscript{15} Like a child learning to tie her shoes, she must experiment with different ways of holding the laces in her hands, which fingers to use, how much tension is needed in each step to keep the bow from coming loose, etc. The singularity of the problem—the length and material of the laces, qualitative factors like the temperature of her hands (cold fingers making fine-motor movements difficult)—will require her to experiment, adjusting how the various elements consist together to address the problem of tying shoelaces.\textsuperscript{16} The experimentation of the philosopher proceeds in a somewhat similar manner: following a movement of thought—or what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the “infinite movement or movement of the infinite,” that thought “claims by right”—philosophy creates concepts.\textsuperscript{17} As the object domain that pertains exclusively to philosophy, the creation of concepts has its own philosophical versions of “laces” and “shoe-tying problems” that require philosophical experimentation, or what Deleuze and Guattari call the “philosophical taste” of coadaptation.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15} In \textit{Difference and Repetition}, Deleuze uses “conjugation” to describe addressing the “problematic field” of learning to swim (165). However, I use the terms “consist” and “resonate” here to gesture at the notion of consistency, one of the central characteristics of the concept, discussed below, as well as the characterization of concepts as “centers of vibration.” \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 19-23.

\textsuperscript{16} This example is inspired by Jeffrey Bell’s example of learning to drive a stick shift car that he uses to illustrate Deleuze and Guattari’s account of the concept, which will be revisited in the following section. \textit{Deleuze and Guattari’s “What is Philosophy?”: A Critical Introduction and Guide} (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 14-16. See also: Deleuze, \textit{Difference and Repetition}, 22-23.

\textsuperscript{17} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 37.

\textsuperscript{18} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 77.
But unlike the child learning to tie her shoelaces, the philosopher does not have a pre-
given set of steps to follow, much less a rhyme to gently guide them through the process of
experimentation. Deleuze and Guattari characterize the movement of thought that leads to the
creation of concepts as being “less in the manner of someone who possesses a method than that
of a dog that seems to be making uncoordinated leaps.”

While attention is given to Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of method in what follows, it is worth briefly expanding on the
nature of these “uncoordinated leaps” that philosophy makes in creating concepts, relating it
back to the kind of reflexivity in the Deleuzian style of philosophy and its role in Deleuze and
Guattari’s account of philosophy. They describe the infinite movement that thought demands as
double, “defined by a coming and going, because it does not advance toward a destination
without already turning back on itself, the needle also being the pole.”

Thus, while the leaps that thought makes might be “uncoordinated” in navigating a problem in the process of concept
creation, they are not haphazard or arbitrarily directed. There is a sort of order or organizing
movement to creating concepts, just as there are criteria for evaluating concepts. What is of the
utmost importance for Deleuze and Guattari, however, is immanence: “there are only immanent
criteria,” since “the criteria for each philosophical activity are found only in the other two, which
is why philosophy develops in paradox.”

While the nature of this “paradox” will become clear

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19 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 55.

20 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 38.

21 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 74, 82. A few passages earlier, Deleuze and Guattari describe
philosophy as paradoxical, clarifying that “it is not because [philosophy] maintains contradictory opinions but rather
because it uses sentences of a standard language to express something that does not belong to the order of opinion or
even of the proposition” (80). Within this context, the use of “paradox” seems to be playing on the term’s
etymological roots as para-doxa: derived from the Greek para meaning “alongside,” “beyond” or “issuing from,”
such that philosophy expresses something that issues from doxa but does not belong to doxa. In other words, despite
appearing “alongside” doxa, what philosophy expresses is, in fact, beyond doxa. Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v.
in elucidating the three philosophical activities—of which creating concepts is one—an
implication that can be drawn from this doubling infinite movement of thought is that philosophy
does not proceed linearly, with each concept improving upon its predecessors, in a progression
toward an end that every created concept brings closer. Philosophy, in other words, does not
create concepts like bricks to be added to our “wall of knowledge,” preserving and advancing our
definite body of truths. The process of experimentation involved in the creation of concepts is
neither directed toward attaining truth, nor is philosophy “inspired by truth. Rather, it is
categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that determine success or failure.”

There is a more subtle instance of the doubling of thought that illustrates the reflexive
nature of Deleuzian experimentation. In the introduction to *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and
Guattari begin their account—supposedly with the intention of providing an answer to the titular
question—by suggesting that the endeavor of determining what exactly philosophy is can only
be properly undertaken “with the arrival of old age,” when the “moment of grace between life
and death” endows the philosopher with the freedom needed to soberly ask, “What is it I have
been doing all my life?” Despite the attention given to the significance of *when* a question is
asked and *when* an answer is attempted—implying, ostensibly, that it is only at this late point in
their collaborative work they consider themselves qualified to write about the nature of the task
of philosophy—Deleuze and Guattari nonetheless boldly admit that they “never stopped asking
this question” and their answer never changed: “philosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and
fabricating concepts.” One might wonder why the question can only be posed late in life if

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22 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 82, 111.
23 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 1.
Deleuze and Guattari, as they claim, already had the answer and that their answer never changed. These statements only appear to conflict, however, based on a conventional understanding of the relationship between questions and answers, in which questions articulate a problem that is then resolved by the answer. Questions and problems, on this understanding, are simply the means to achieving answers and solutions, with the assumption that the means disappear in the achievement of the desired ends, like a thirst slaked by water.  

In contrast to the usual emphasis placed on answers and solutions, Deleuze and Guattari are operating out of a different understanding of questions and answers, the development of which Deleuze began in his earlier works, particularly in “The Method of Dramatization” and Bergsonism. While a more thorough examination will be given to the role of problems and the influence of Henri Bergson’s method of problematization in relation to concept creation, for now, a cursory look at the opening passage of “The Method of Dramatization” will help clarify Deleuze and Guattari’s statements about when a question is asked and when it is answered. Deleuze begins the essay by claiming: “It is not certain that the question what is it? is a good question in order to discover the essence or the Idea. It is possible that the questions of the type: who?, how much?, how?, where?, when? are better—as much for discovering essence as for determining something more important concerning the Idea.”

Putting aside for the moment the

25 In Difference and Repetition, Deleuze associates this view of problems with the dogmatic image of thought and, specifically, its seventh postulate, according to which, he explains, “We are led to believe that problems are given ready-made, and that they disappear in the responses or the solution” (158).

26 Gilles Deleuze, “The Method of Dramatization” in Desert Islands and Other Texts: 1953-1974, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 94. What Deleuze means by “Idea” is not entirely clear in the context of the essay. However, a distinction that Deleuze and Guattari attribute to Henri Michaux in What is Philosophy? between “current ideas” and “vital ideas,” offers some indication. Vital ideas are described as ideas “that must be created,” whereas current ideas “can only be associated as images and can only be ordered as abstractions” (207). This description of vital ideas relates to an earlier passage in which the concept is referred to as a “philosophical Idea,” which differs from the Ideas created by art and science (8). It can thus be inferred that Ideas and vital ideas are coextensive terms that describe the different objects created by philosophy,
further conundrum this introduces concerning the title, *What is Philosophy?*, the account of
philosophy that Deleuze and Guattari develop ultimately reflects the “spatiotemporal
dynamisms” that *who, where, when*, etc. questions are better at determining. Their account of
creating concepts involves laying out a plane of immanence and inventing conceptual personae
who bring life to philosophy’s conceptual practice, all of which takes place within processes of
deterritorialization and reterritorialization that Deleuze and Guattari refer to as
“geophilosophy.” Not only do these various elements and philosophical activities address the
*who, how, where* and *when* questions; they also indicate why the question “*what is philosophy?*”
can only be posed late in life, which is not for the sake of the answer but for the sake of the
*question* itself. The answer, Deleuze and Guattari explain, “not only had to gather [*recueille*] the
question, it also had to specify the *question’s* moment, its occasions and circumstances, its
landscapes and personae, its conditions and unknowns.” It is in this sense that while Deleuze

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27 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, chapters 1-4, in particular p.77 for a summary of philosophy’s three elements.

28 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 2. Quotation is based on my own translation, which diverges from
Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell’s translation in a few key ways. First, their translation of “*recueille*” as “take
note of” has a more passive connotation, giving the impression that the answer simply receives a ready-made
question. By contrast, rendering *recueille* as “gather” suggests a more active relation to the question, the latter of
which is not ready-made but must be assembled, created. Deleuze endorses Bergson’s claim that properly stating a
problem is not a matter of “discovery or uncovering,” but rather an “effort of invention.” *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh
Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 5. The second change concerns the inclusion of
the italicized “*the question’s*” in order to clarify the subject of the second part of the sentence. While Tomlinson and
Burchell’s translation suggests that it is the answer’s “moment,” “circumstances,” “landscapes,” etc., the original
passage in French indicates that these various elements are indexed to the question: “*Mais il ne fallait pas seulement
que la réponse recueille la question, il fallait aussi qu’elle détermine une heure, une occasion, des circonstances,
des paysages et des personnages, des conditions et des inconnues de la question.*” *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?*
(Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1991), 8. There is, admittedly, some ambiguity as to whether the first few items in
the list, particularly, “*une heure, une occasion*,” are being ascribed to the answer or the question. The latter items,
however, are explicitly attributed to the question [*de la question*], especially “*des conditions et des inconnues.*”
Given that there is no indication of a change of subject, it seems reasonable to assume that all of the items listed are
meant to be attributes of the question and not the answer.
and Guattari may have already had the answer to the question, “what is philosophy?,” the who, where, when, etc., of the question had not yet been determined. The answer had to wait, in a sense, for its question, rather than the question waiting for its answer.

**A Pedagogy of the Concept**

To understand how concepts are created, it will be useful to begin by distinguishing Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the concept from other accounts of philosophical concepts. It was already mentioned that Deleuze and Guattari reject Frege and Russell’s definition of concepts as propositional functions with a truth value defined by reference to the set of objects that constitute its extension. The concept-as-function ultimately models philosophy’s object domain in the image of scientific functions, which operate and “derive their power from reference…to states of affairs.” In contrast to the Fregean/Russellian concept, the Hegelian notion of the concept is not defined in terms of external relations but “by the figures of its creation and the Moments of its self-positing.” Deleuze and Guattari praise the post-Kantians’ attention to the philosophical reality of the concept as self-positing creation, most notably Hegel and Schelling. Hegel achieved this, however, “at the cost of an indeterminate extension of philosophy that…left scarcely any independent movement of the arts and sciences remaining.” In other words, the Fregean/Russellian concept, on the one hand, subsumes its philosophical reality under the scientific reality of the function, yielding all of philosophy’s creative object domain to the sciences. Hegel, on the other hand, reasserted the philosophical reality of the

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29 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 136.


31 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 11.

32 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 12.
concept only to over-extend its reach as “reconstituted universals” in absolute Spirit. While maintaining the philosophical reality of the concept, Deleuze and Guattari nonetheless want to avoid the post-Kantian project of a “universal encyclopedia of the concept.” It is from within this context that Deleuze and Guattari propose the “modest task of a pedagogy of the concept.”

There is a hint of feigned pretense in this profession of modesty, as Deleuze and Guattari see genuine dangers arising from these alternative notions of the concept. When the ground of concept creation is not clearly delineated by its philosophical reality—either by conceding it to the sciences or universalizing its reach to encompass all domains—the concept risks being appropriated by philosophy’s various “rivals” and commodified as a marketable object of exchange. Deleuze and Guattari refer to this as philosophy’s “most shameful moment,” when marketing, advertising and the disciplines of communication “seized hold of the word concept itself and proclaim: ‘This is our concern, we are the creative ones, we are the ideas men!” Unable to compete with these “young executives” in the production—as opposed to the creation—of “the marketable form of the concept,” philosophy is forced to concede its domain of concept creation to the capitalist forces that endlessly work to commodify it. Once philosophy finds itself confronted by its “shameless and inane rivals,” it “feels driven to fulfill the task of creating concepts that are aerolites rather than commercial products.” This is a reactive move, taken in desperation by a cornered and humiliated philosophy. Once appropriated, the concept’s value is reduced to its marketable economic value. Philosophy reacts to this

33 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 12.
34 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 10.
35 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 11.
36 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 11.
cheapened instrumentalized form of value by creating concepts unrelated to problems or other concepts, leaving them meaningless, like meteorites passing in outer space.\(^{37}\) In losing possession of its rightful domain, philosophy relinquishes the creation of concepts to the capitalist: “The simulacrum, the simulation of a packet of noodles, has become the true concept; and the one who packages the product…has become the philosopher…”\(^{38}\)

Some might be doubtful about the genuine threat of such dangers and whether the concept as Fregean propositional function or as Hegelian absolute Spirit truly puts philosophy at risk of “falling from the heights of [a universal encyclopedia of the concept] into the disaster” of the concept as marketable product for “commercial professional training” in the service of “universal capitalism.”\(^{39}\) While Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of philosophy of communication elucidates the circumstances of their concerns about philosophy’s “most shameful moment,” there is an alternative way of understanding Deleuze and Guattari’s argument against these alternative accounts of the concept. Jeffrey Bell, for instance, focuses on Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the term “pedagogy” to illustrate how their notion of the concept relates to the account of

\(^{37}\) Deleuze and Guattari’s description of such concepts as “aerolites” appears to be a reference to Nietzsche’s remarks about philosophers as comets in the absence of culture: “Only a culture such as the Greeks possessed can answer our question as to the task of the philosopher, and only it, I repeat, can justify philosophy at all, because it alone knows and can demonstrate why and how the philosopher is not a chance random wanderer, exiled to this place or to that…But what if such a culture does not exist? Then the philosopher is a comet, incalculable and therefore terror-inspiring.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Chicago: Regnery, 1962), 32. Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of the role of geography as affirming the power of milieu in the “Geophilosophy” chapter of *What is Philosophy?*, more explicitly builds on the influence of Nietzsche and his notion of the unhistorical as “like an atmosphere”: “All living things require an atmosphere around them, a mysterious misty vapor; if they are deprived of this envelope, if a religion, an art, a genius is condemned to revolve as a star without atmosphere, we should no longer be surprised if they quickly wither and grow hard and unfruitful.” Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 32, 97.

\(^{38}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 10.

\(^{39}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 11.
learning they seek to develop.\textsuperscript{40} Like the earlier illustration of experimentation needed in learning to tie shoelaces, Bell draws on Deleuze’s account of learning to swim in \textit{Difference and Repetition} and his own example of learning to drive a stick shift car, using these to demonstrate how: “one is to place learning into… the singular conditions of [a] problem space, rather than place learning in relationship to existent facts (Russell) or to the autopoetic returning into itself of a pure subjectivity (Hegel).”\textsuperscript{41} The child learning to tie her shoelaces doesn’t simply acquire all the pre-existing facts related to tying shoelaces and then correctly—i.e., methodically—reproduce these steps in the movements of her hands.

With regards to the critique of learning based on the Hegelian version of the concept, we can perhaps better elucidate Bell’s interpretation through the contrast that Deleuze and Guattari draw between their own attempt to present a \textit{pedagogy} of the concept and the post-Kantian project that they characterize as “a universal \textit{encyclopedia} of the concept.”\textsuperscript{42} The latter could be understood, on the one hand, as drawing a comparison between an encyclopedia’s large breadth of topics and the “indeterminate extension of philosophy” that follows from Hegel’s account of the concept, in which the movements of the dialectic come to encompass all moments of human life. On this interpretation, Hegel seeks to achieve the kind of systematic, comprehensive scope of the concept’s myriad aspects akin to an encyclopedia’s alphabetically or thematically arranged entries summarizing current, authoritative knowledge on a wide range of subjects. In this sense, one could understand the critique implicit in Deleuze and Guattari’s characterization of the post-Kantian project as calling into question both the legitimacy of granting the concept—and, as a

\textsuperscript{40} Bell, \textit{Deleuze and Guattari’s “What is Philosophy?”}, 13-14.

\textsuperscript{41} Bell, \textit{Deleuze and Guattari’s “What is Philosophy?”}, 14. See also: Deleuze, \textit{Difference and Repetition}, 23.

\textsuperscript{42} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 12.
consequence, philosophy—such an expansive, ill-defined reach, as well as the desirability of the philosophical aspiration for breadth, at the sacrifice of depth. In Deleuzian terms, such a project ultimately falls back on universals (breadth), thereby abandoning the singular (depth), “and the concept as a specifically philosophical creation is always a singularity.”

On the other hand, given the contrast with “pedagogy,” Deleuze and Guattari’s characterization of the post-Kantian project could also be a reference to the etymological roots of the term “encyclopedia,” which is derived from the Greek *enkyklios paideia*. While there is some debate among contemporary scholars concerning the exact meaning of the term among the various ancient texts in which it appears, for present purposes, we can begin to see the connections to Hegel’s account of the concept based on a more literal translation: *enkyklios* as “circular” or “revolving in a cycle”—with the regularity of such a recurrence sometimes being rendered as “ordinary” or “everyday”—and *paideia* as “education,” “learning” or “culture” as its result.

Together, the term *enkyklios paideia* can be translated as “all-round cultural knowledge,” or what today might be referred to as a liberal arts education, in which one learns a variety of subjects before specializing in any particular one.

In her study of education in ancient Greece, Raffaella Cribiore interprets the circularity of *enkyklios* as describing the “painstaking regularity” of acquiring an education, as the student progressed through a “series of steps.”

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43 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 7.


learning…did not go straight up the slope but proceeded in slow circles. Each circle expanded and enriched the compass of the preceding…”  

There is a similar kind of continually expanding, circular “regularity” to the movement of the Hegelian concept as an autopoetic returning into itself in the dialectic. While Hegel affirms the concept as a creation by establishing it as a self-positing autopoiesis—in contrast to the concept for Russell, which is formed from pre-existing facts—the basis of Deleuze and Guattari’s critique concerns the source of this circular regularity in Hegel’s account of history. They argue that Hegel remains a historicist insofar as he posits “history as a form of interiority in which the concept necessarily develops or unveils its destiny. The necessity rests on the abstraction of the historical element rendered circular.” Thus, the movement of the “pure subjectivity” to which Hegel attributes concept creation—at least according to Deleuze and Guattari—is driven by a necessity derived from an abstraction of the historical, as opposed to the necessity that emerges from the singular moments. To return to our original example of a child learning to tie her shoelaces, the process of learning, according to Deleuze and Guattari, does not follow, with “painstaking regularity,” the circular movements of a pure subjectivity developing toward shoelace-tying knowledge as its “destiny.” The process of learning, rather, proceeds more like the “uncoordinated leaps” that characterize the infinite movement of thought.

**Concept of the Concept**

Given the above critiques of these alternative notions of the concept, one begins to get a sense of the specific set of features and conditions that will characterize Deleuze and Guattari’s account of the concept. Unlike the concession of philosophy’s domain to the sciences or its

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47 Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 129.

48 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 95.
indeterminate extension to other domains that result, respectively, from Russell and Hegel’s versions of the concept, Deleuze and Guattari’s account of the concept sets up certain parameters that, when taken together, delineate concept creation as a fairly narrow object domain, which, they argue, pertains exclusively to philosophy. Concepts, they claim, “belong to philosophy by right, because it is philosophy that creates them and never stops creating them.”

We can begin by outlining the concept’s defining features, following, to some extent, the order in which Deleuze and Guattari present them in the first chapter of *What is Philosophy?*. The concept is characterized in terms of: 1) its exoconsistency, 2) as a heterogeneous multiplicity, 3) its endoconsistency, 4) its components understood as intensive ordinates or variations, and 5) as a self-positing absolute surface in a state of survey. These features should not be understood as simply independent properties that, when added together, constitute Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the concept. Rather, these defining features themselves mirror the kind of relationality that is found in—or, better yet, expressed by—the concept’s intensive ordinality. In other words, like the distinct yet inseparable components that constitute the

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49 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 33.

50 The chapter can be roughly divided into two sections: the first half (15-24) describes the various features and conditions of the concept, while the second half (24-34) presents examples 1 and 2—the first of the thirteen examples Deleuze and Guattari offer throughout the book. While the second half of the chapter is more clearly divided into two subsections—example 1 on Descartes’ *cogito* and example 2 on the concepts of the Platonic Idea, Cartesian *cogito* and Kantian *cogito*—the first half, in a less obvious way, also seems to be divided into two parts, both of which present the features and conditions of the concept but in slightly different ways. Deleuze and Guattari “[start] with a fairly complex example,” using the concept of *autrui* or the Other Person, a playful quip on every concept being a multiplicity such that “there are no simple concepts,” while also demonstrating, performatively, why “it is not obvious that philosophy must have a beginning” (15). This first attempt of ‘getting at’ the concept of the *concept* is followed by a second, perhaps more philosophically traditional enumeration of the concept’s defining features. It is this second exposition of the concept that I use as a general guideline for outlining its five features. While the chapter can be interpreted in ways that do not necessarily map onto the subdivisions I have presented here, the importance of doubling for Deleuze seems to support this interpretation insofar as each subsection seems to double back on itself, with elements being repeated (e.g., the double use of the Cartesian *cogito* in the second half) and other features gaining prominence in being emphasized differently.
concept’s consistency, the various features that characterize Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of
the concept are themselves distinct yet, in their own way, inseparable.

**Exoconsistency**

The concept’s exoconsistency describes the way in which every concept exists within a
nexus of relations to other concepts, in terms of its connections to other concepts historically
and, more importantly, in “its present connections” to other concepts on the same plane of
immanence.\(^1\) With regard to its present connections, the components of a concept—i.e., the
heterogenous “parts” of the concept explained below—can themselves “be grasped as concepts,”
such that each concept “extends to infinity.”\(^2\) Like a thread of yarn in which one or more of the
strands of fiber branch off to twist into other plies or threads of yarn, the concept “relates back to
other concepts,” achieving an exoconsistency through the strength of these branching fibers, or
what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as “moveable bridges,” which leave philosophy “in a
perpetual state of digression or digressiveness.”\(^3\) Pulling one thread, in a sense, tugs on the other
threads through these twisting, fibrous bridges. To perhaps emphasize the fact that the concept is
“an incorporeal”—even if it is “incarnated or effectuated in bodies”—Deleuze and Guattari tend
to use sonic language, like “resonance” (an issue I return to below), to describe the concept’s

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\(^1\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 19.

\(^2\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 19.

\(^3\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 23. This yarn metaphor is inspired by Deleuze’s concept of the fold,
Athlone Press, 1993). The French verb *plier* refers to the activity of spinning yarn. However, the strands of fiber that
compose spun yarn are themselves referred to as plies once twisted (or plied) together. For more on the terminology
of yarn, see: Jeffrey Splitstos, “The Parenthetical Notation Method for Recording Yarn Structure,” in *Textiles and
Politics: Textile Society of America 13th Biennial Symposium Proceedings* (Washington D.C., September 18-22,
2012), 745.
exoconsistency.\textsuperscript{54} Thus, instead of thinking of the nondiscursive relations that the concept “freely [enters] into” with other concepts as fibers of yarn splitting off to twist together with other fibers to form other threads of yarn—lest the metaphor is erroneously understood as suggesting that the interconceptual relations are extensional—one could also think of the concept’s exoconsistency as sound waves that achieve a synchronous vibration. Moreover, philosophy’s state of digression, which is generated by the concept’s exoconsistency, in part explains how the concept should be seen as excursive, as opposed to discursive, the latter being a common characterization of the concept—a consequence of the traditional propositional understanding of the concept—which Deleuze and Guattari emphatically reject.\textsuperscript{55}

\textit{Heterogeneous multiplicity}

Perhaps the most important feature of the concept, and the one that Deleuze and Guattari emphasize first in their account of the concept, is that “every concept has components” such that there are no “simple” or homogenous concepts.\textsuperscript{56} Thus, every concept \textit{qua} multiplicity—although not all multiplicities are concepts—has at least two or more components, which are themselves heterogeneous. In other words, every concept is a composition of components that are distinct—although, as we will see with the concept’s endoconsistency, also inseparable—and therefore account for or generate the concept’s internal differentiation, which is, importantly, \textit{not}

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\item \textsuperscript{54} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 23.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Cf. Mary Beth Mader, \textit{Sleights of Reason: Norm, Bisexuality, Development}, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011). Mader distinguishes between exoconsistency and what she refers to as interconceptual relations, describing the latter as “the most philosophically traditional feature of the concept,” insofar as other philosophers, such as Hegel and Frege, include it in their own accounts of the concept (9). She specifies that Deleuze’s inclusion of infinite interrelations distinguishes this feature of the concept from those other accounts. Based on my interpretation of the chapter, “What is a concept?” and the way in which it is organized, I understand exoconsistency and interconceptual relations as describing the same feature of the concept (q.v. n.50 above).
\item \textsuperscript{56} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 15.
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additive. The internal differentiation of the concept is not the result of different components falling under the concept, like species of a genus, in which each component would be an extension of the concept’s scope, as is the case for Frege and Russell’s notion of the concept. As Mary Beth Mader explains, “the specific kind of composition” that characterizes Deleuze and Guattari’s concept “is not a partes extra partes, an assemblage of parts whose full natures are external to each other.” On the contrary, the concept, as a heterogenesis, is “an ordering” of a finite number of components, each of which is an “intensive feature” that is ordinally related, as opposed to being in extensive relations to the concept.

While the nature of the concept’s distinct yet inseparable components is really best understood in terms of the concept’s endoconsistency, before turning to this feature, it will be worthwhile to briefly expand on the notion of multiplicity in order to further clarify what it means for the concept to be a heterogenous multiplicity. In *Dialogues*, Deleuze states that “the noun multiplicity” is that which:

> designates a set of lines or dimensions which are irreducible to one another…In a multiplicity what counts are not the terms or the elements, but what there is ‘between’, the between, a set of relations which are not separable from each other…To extract the concepts which correspond to a multiplicity is to trace the lines of which it is made up, to determine the nature of these lines, to see how they become entangled, connect, bifurcate, avoid or fail to avoid the foci.

As a composition of its components, the concept is a composite. However, what “counts” or what is essential is the “nature of [the] lines” or the “set of relations” *between* the components, which the concept posits in the moment of its creation.

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58 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 20.

Endoconsistency

This emphasis on the “set of relations” between the components as what is important, leads us to the concept’s endoconsistency. Here, Deleuze and Guattari describe concepts as “centers of vibrations,” wherein the “sole object” of each concept is “the inseparability of the components,” which the concept “renders…inseparable within itself.”60 If the concept’s exoconsistency relates to the way in which the concept consists with other concepts through throwing out “movable bridges” that trace these interconceptual lines, then the concept’s endoconsistency captures the way in which the concept consists within itself through the consisting together of its components.61 Deleuze and Guattari describe the concept’s “set of relations which are not separable from each other” in terms of how each component “partially overlaps” such that it “has a zone of neighborhood [zone de voisinage], or a threshold of indiscernibility” with the other components.62 The concept is “the point of coincidence, condensation, or accumulation” of these thresholds, in which the components are distinct yet inseparable.63 To return to our yarn metaphor, the concept’s endoconsistency is like the twisting of the fibers; it is the nature of the twist and the way in which it combines the fibers, creating a tension through holding together the distinct lines of fiber that composes the yarn. In a sense, the yarn is nothing more than the nature of its twisting. It is the twisting of its fibers and not something above and beyond the consistency achieved in and through the twisting.

60 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 19, 23.
61 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 19.
62 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 19.
63 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 20.
Since Deleuze and Guattari also characterize the concept as “a concrete assemblage,” another way to approach the concept’s endoconsistency is through the descriptions they present of other kinds of assemblages and the sort of consistency they achieve. For instance, in *Dialogues*, Deleuze explains how the heterogeneity of the assemblage, as opposed to the “conditions of homogeneity” characteristic of structures, should be understood as a “co-functioning” or a “symbiosis.”

In this text, Deleuze rearticulates one of the biological examples of an assemblage’s symbiotic relations presented in *A Thousand Plateaus* in terms of the orchid and the wasp. In this particular case, one finds orchids that exhibit certain characteristics of female wasps, thereby attracting male wasps who, in attempting to reproduce, transfer pollen from orchid to orchid. Deleuze explains how, ostensibly:

> the orchid seems to form a wasp image, but in fact there is a wasp-becoming of the orchid, an orchid-becoming of the wasp, a double capture since ‘what’ each becomes changes no less than ‘that which’ becomes. The wasp becomes part of the orchid’s reproductive apparatus at the same time as the orchid becomes the sexual organ of the wasp...an ‘a-parallel evolution of two beings who have nothing whatsoever to do with one another.’

Like the wasp and the orchid, the components of the concept are distinct, i.e., they “have nothing whatsoever to do with one another” in the sense that there is nothing inherently “about” any single component that would necessarily entail it consisting with other components, just as there is nothing “about” the orchid or the wasp that necessitates the “double capture” of “‘what’ each becomes.” In other words, it is not like a key and a lock, which, despite being two distinct beings, one can nonetheless determine the shape of the lock from the shape of the key. Like a mirror image of the lock, the key *implies* the lock in a way that is not found in the case of the

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64 Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, 52.


orchid and the wasp or among the components of the concept. Moreover, unlike the relation between the key and the lock, the distinct species in the orchid-wasp assemblage depend on each other for their survival and reproduction. What such cases of biological symbiosis therefore illustrate is that the identification of the two distinct species ultimately relies on the formation of such assemblages. And yet, there is a zone of indiscernibility between the components, as seen in the case of the orchid and the wasp such that the wasp, as “a piece of the orchid’s reproductive apparatus,” is a becoming-orchid, while the orchid also “becomes the object of an orgasm in the wasp,” a becoming-wasp. The two become indiscernible at a point. For the components, this point simply is the concept. It is that which holds together the components in such a way that they achieve such becomings, forming areas of indiscernibility or zones of neighborhood.

**Components as Intensive Ordinates or Variations**

While the inseparability of the concept’s components “define the internal consistency of the concept,” the components remain distinct as “pure and simple variations,” with each component characterized as “an intensive feature, an intensive ordinate,” as opposed to constants or variables. The concept of intensity plays a central role in a number of Deleuze and Guattari’s works, which develop and employ it in different ways, depending on the particular problematic of the subject. In *What is Philosophy?* the notion of intensity is used to distinguish

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69 See: Daniel Smith, “On the Nature of Concepts,” *Parallax* 18, no. 1 (2012): 62-73. Smith refers to the preface of the Italian translation of *The Logic of Sense*, in which he explains how, “Deleuze himself briefly charts out the becoming of the concept of intensity within his own work. In *Difference and Repetition*, he says, the concept of intensity was primarily related to the dimension of depth. In *The Logic of Sense*, everything changes. The concept of intensity is retained, but it is now related primarily to the dimension of surface: same concept, but different components. In *Anti-Oedipus* the concept enters yet another becoming which is related to neither depth nor surface: rising and falling intensities are now events that take place on a body without organs. One might add a fourth
the “processual” or “modular” nature of the intensive features, which determine the “inseparability of variations,” from the extensive conditions that determine the “independence of variables” found in propositions, which are defined by their reference to a state of affairs.\(^{70}\) In other words, the components defined as variations, as opposed to variables, draws a distinct contrast between concepts and propositions, intensive ordinates and extensive coordinates, a perpetual state of digression and discursive formation.\(^{71}\) We can understand the concept’s components as intensive ordinates, on the one hand, as another way in which Deleuze and Guattari differentiate their own concept from Frege’s notion of the concept as an extensional propositional function. Yet, on the other hand, the ontology of intensities that Deleuze develops speaks to a more complex approach to the concept that is being invoked in characterizing the components as variations or intensive ordinates.

In “Whence Intensity?,” Mader presents a detailed overview of the history of the concept of intensity in philosophical and scientific traditions and the particular position that Deleuze takes up within this discourse and develops in his own ontology of intensity.\(^{72}\) Mader’s discussion on the influence of the Medieval French theologian, Nicolas Oresme, on Deleuze’s concept of intensity is particularly relevant to understanding the components of the concept as intensive ordinates. Oresme’s contribution to debates among Medieval scholars on intensive change—and specifically the question of how to account for the nature of the change that

\(^{70}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 20, 23.

\(^{71}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 22-23.

pertains to the intensification of a quality—is his graphic representation of extension and intensity as two aspects of a quality. With a horizontal line representing a quality’s extension and a vertical line representing its intensity, Mader explains how Oresme’s graphical representation of intensification importantly differs from the Cartesian coordinate system insofar as, “the specificity of intensity and extensity are not identified and fused in the Oresmian diagram. The coordinate system, by contrast, reduces the two radically distinct realities of extensity and intensity.”

Deleuze retains this “duality” of the “distinctive difference between intensity and extension” from Oresme, developing his own account of “the specific character of intensity” that diverges from contemporary scientific and philosophical accounts that identify it as either fundamentally qualitative in nature or as extended quantity. Mader interprets Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of “a coordinative concept of intensity” in What is Philosophy?, in favor of their own concept of quantitative intensity adapted from Oresme, as marking a clear delineation between the sciences and philosophy, with the former understood as “a practice of establishing coordinate systems, and working with the functions that they permit,” and philosophy as “the intellectual pursuit that attends to intensities.” As intensive ordinates, the components of the concept display the kind of quantitative intensity that Deleuze and Guattari seek to demarcate as “the proper province of philosophy.”

Yet, as intensive features or variables, the components of the concept do more than just delineate the domain of intensities as the proper domain of philosophy, thereby distinguishing

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73 Mader, “Whence Intensity?,” 236.
philosophy from the sciences. The internal variation of the components can also be understood in relation to the internal consistency that defines the concept.⁷⁷ In his analysis of Deleuze and Guattari’s analytic of concepts, Daniel Smith touches on this relation in asserting that the concept’s “consistency must have as its necessary complement the internal variability of the concept.”⁷⁸ But why must the concept’s internal consistency be complemented by the internal variability of its components?

There are two separate claims that Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari make about philosophy and the concept that, I propose, together offer an indication as to the necessity of the complementary relation between the internal consistency and internal variability of the concept. For the first, in the letter preface to Jean-Clet Martin’s book, Variations, Deleuze asserts—perhaps surprisingly to some—that he believes “in philosophy as a system,” but clarifies that such a system, “must not only be in perpetual heterogeneity, it must be in heterogenesis.”⁷⁹ In the second, Deleuze and Guattari explain, in What is Philosophy?, how the concept is “both absolute and relative”: “[It] is relative to its own components, to other concepts, to the plane on which it is defined, and to the problems it is supposed to resolve; but it is absolute through the condensation it carries out, the site it occupies on the plane, and the conditions it assigns to the problem.”⁸⁰ The concept, as both absolute and relative, highlights the way in which the concept is open and closed, a “fragmentary totality” that is immanently total, i.e., absolute in terms of its consistency or, as explained below, “infinite through its survey,” yet fragmentary or “finite

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⁷⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 20.


⁸⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 21.
through its movement that traces the contour of its components.”81 It is this latter aspect, the concept as relative and fragmentary, that I propose proceeds from the heterogeneity of the components as variations. While the components are singularities that the concept, as the point of condensation, posits together in its endoconsistency, the components nonetheless exhibit heterogeneity as “phases of a variation.”82 Thus, the heterogeneity of the concept—through its distinct, yet inseparable components—together with the heterogeneity of the components themselves—on account of the phases or modes of the variations that the concept arranges into zones of indiscernibility—entails that, for Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the concept, it is heterogeneity all the way down.83 As variations and not fixed, co-ordering variables, the components are the condition for the perpetuity of the concept’s heterogeneity by complementing its consistency as absolute totality. Raymond Bellour and Melissa McMuhan refer to this complementary tension as the concept’s “antagonistic dimension,” such that the concept is “both what suspends, arrests, consists and what flees, opens all the lines of flight.”84 If perpetual heterogeneity derives in part from the processual, modular nature of the variations, then heterogenesis is related to the way in which the concept “is ordinal, an intension present in

81 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 21, 26.

82 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 25.

83 Within Deleuze’s broader ontological framework, especially as set out in Difference and Repetition, it would be more accurate to characterize his position as positing difference all the way down. However, the emphasis on heterogeneity here is germane within the specific context of describing a system of philosophy that is in heterogenesis. Moreover, heterogeneity and difference are not unrelated, as is evident, for instance, in Deleuze’s account of the “in-itself of difference” in which he describes a system constituted by heterogenous series that are defined by the differences between the terms that compose each series as being the first condition under which difference develops “this in-itself as a ‘differenciator’” (Difference and Repetition, 117-120).

all the features that make it up.”\(^{85}\) It is in the context of describing the concept as being “in a state of *survey* [*survol*] in relation to its components,” that Deleuze and Guattari define the concept as a heterogenesis.\(^{86}\) I return to the notions of heterogenesis and absolute survey/surface in the final feature of the concept as a self-positing intensive ordinate.

First, however, it will be useful to further elucidate the nature of these phases or modes of the concept’s variations by briefly turning to Descartes’s *cogito*, the first example of a concept that Deleuze and Guattari present in *What is Philosophy?*, in order to “observe” the components “in the wild,” so to speak. As a multiplicity, Descartes’s concept of the self, the Cartesian *cogito*, which is familiarly encapsulated in the expression, “I think ‘therefore’ I am,” can be articulated in its complete form as, “Myself who doubts, I think, I am, I am a thinking thing.”\(^{87}\) From this unabbreviated version, one can begin to distinguish the three components of the *cogito*: doubting, thinking and being.\(^{88}\) The “I” is the point of condensation that passes through each component, creating zones of neighborhood between them, thereby generating the *cogito*’s endoconsistency. Doubting and thinking define the first zone: “myself who doubts, I cannot doubt that I think.” The second zone then emerges between thinking and being: “in order to think it is necessary to be.”\(^{89}\) What is important for the present purposes of illustrating the components as intensive ordinates, are the phases of each component or variation in the *cogito*. Deleuze and Guattari explain:

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\(^{85}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 20.

\(^{86}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 20.

\(^{87}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 24.

\(^{88}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 24-25.

\(^{89}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 25.
Doubt includes moments that are not the species of a genus but the *phases* of a variation: perceptual, scientific, obsessional doubt (every concept therefore has a phase space, although not in the same way as in science). The same goes for modes of thought—feeling, imagining, having ideas—and also for types of being, thing, or substance—finite being, finite thinking being, extended being. It is noteworthy that in the last case the concept of self retains only the second phase of being and excludes the rest of the variation. But this is precisely the sign that the concept is *closed* as fragmentary totality with “I am a thinking thing”: we can pass to other phases of being only by bridges or crossroads that lead to other concepts.\(^90\)

We can understand these phases of the concept’s variations as points of emphasis that “shift,” according to Mader, “depending on the ‘circulation’ of the concept’s internal point of condensation.”\(^91\) It is these shifts of emphasis through the phases of the variations that not only sustain the perpetual heterogeneity that complements the concept’s consistency. They also generate the internal differentiation of the concept that, according to Mader, “constitutes the possibility for self-reference in the concept,” i.e., the concept as a self-positing intensive ordinate.\(^92\)

*Self-positing Intensive Ordinate*

The final feature of the concept as a self-positing intensive ordinate seems to not only subtend all the other features. But, as noted above, the specific attribute of self-positing importantly bears on the notions of heterogenesis and absolute survey/surface, both of which are, in different ways, particularly difficult to grasp yet, nonetheless, crucial to understanding Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the concept.

The concept, as the “point of coincidence” that runs through the overlapping zones of indiscernibility among the heterogenous components, “posits itself and its object at the same

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\(^{91}\) Mader, *Sleights of Reason*, 11.

\(^{92}\) Mader, *Sleights of Reason*, 11.
time as it is created,” with its object pertaining solely to “the inseparability of the components that constitute its consistency.”93 One can begin to grasp the way in which the concept is self-positing or “self-referential” insofar as it creates or generates its own internal consistency through positing its components together, or what Mader describes as “the positing-together of these components.”94 In other words, the concept does not refer to the thresholds of indiscernibility of its components. Rather, in the “positing-together” of its components that forms these zones of indiscernibility, the concept is “an intension present in all the features that make it up.”95 It is important, however, to not conflate the concept’s endoconsistency—the consisting together of its components—with the concept’s self-positing. That is to say, the concept positing itself is not the same as or identical to the concept positing the inseparability of its components, despite these instances of positing happening “at the same time.”96

While this distinction is subtle, it becomes clearer when understood in relation to Deleuze and Guattari’s central—and arguably uncompromising—position on the fundamental status of immanence in philosophy. Immanence, they argue, is “the burning issue of all philosophy because it takes on all the dangers that philosophy must confront.”97 In order to confront such dangers—many of which derive from the dogmatic image of thought—it is crucial that the transcendent not be reintroduced into the concept by making immanence “immanent to

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93 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 22-23.
95 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 20.
96 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 22.
97 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 45.
Something.” Given this cursory understanding of Deleuze and Guattari’s position on the role of immanence in philosophy, we can begin to appreciate how, among the various features of the concept, it is the concept as self-positing that preserves pure immanence by making the concept immanent to itself. If the concept were not self-positing—if it did not “posit itself…at the same time as it is created,”—then the cause of its creation would be external to it, such that the concept refers to something other than itself, i.e., it would be referential. Transcendence would then be introduced into immanence by making it immanent to that which it refers. For Deleuze and Guattari, “immanence is immanent only to itself…and leaves nothing remaining to which it could be immanent.” One can understand the primacy of immanence, intensity, ordinality, and multiplicity as all various aspects or manifestations of Deleuze’s univocity of being, or what Mader refers to as “an ontological leveling, a dehierarchization,” such that, according to Deleuze, “Being is said in a single and same sense of everything of which it is said…”

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98 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 45.

99 To clarify, the self-positing of the concept does not deny or undermine the claim that it is the philosopher who creates concepts. There is only a tension between these two claims insofar as one presupposes a subject-object dichotomy and a unidirectional relation between the concept, as created object, and the philosopher, as creator-subject. Deleuze and Guattari, however, seek to move away from such subject-object dichotomies, proposing a more a-subjective, a-personal conception of thinking and the activities of creation. This is most explicit in the “Geophilosophy” chapter of *What is Philosophy?*, in which Deleuze and Guattari begin by stating: “Subject and object give a poor approximation of thought. Thinking is neither a line drawn between subject and object nor a revolving of one around the other. Rather, thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth” (85). Deleuze and Guattari not only challenge the traditional idea that thinking takes place in the subject or in some relation between the subject and object, they also claim that the philosopher is not unaltered in the process of creating concepts. This is evident in their account of conceptual personae and the role of such personae in concept creation: “The conceptual persona is not the philosopher’s representative but, rather, the reverse: the philosopher is only the envelope of his principle conceptual persona and of all the other personae who are the intercessors, the real subjects of his philosophy. Conceptual personae are the philosopher’s ‘heteronyms,’ and the philosopher’s name is the simple pseudonym of his personae. I am no longer myself but thought’s aptitude for finding itself and spreading across a plane that passes through me at several places” (*What is Philosophy?*, 64).

100 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 45.

It is within this context that the concept, as a self-positing intensive ordinate, connects to the concept as a heterogenesis. If a heterogenesis is understood as a self-organizing system in which the cause of its unity is immanent, then self-positing would be a necessary condition for such a system.102 In other words, the concept qua heterogenesis, must be self-positing in order to have “the point of closure or saturation” determined by the concept’s internal consistency—or what one might call the concept’s principle of organization—be immanent.103 Thus, while endoconsistency articulates the nature of the concept’s organizing principle as one of consistency, the concept as self-positing identifies the source of this organizing principle as immanent, as opposed to transcendent.

While Deleuze and Guattari do not themselves use the notion of an organizing principle to describe the concept’s consistency in terms of organizing its components, there is a clear preference for the language of “ordering” or “linking” to describe the concept’s relation to its components.104 The reason for introducing the notion of an organizing principle and using it in this somewhat non-traditional context—given the condition that it be an immanent, as opposed to transcendent principle—is to highlight a distinction Raymond Ruyer draws between an active and passive sense of “organization.”105 This distinction also ultimately serves as a suitable point of entry to Ruyer’s more enigmatic notion of an “absolute surface” or survey, which informs Deleuze and Guattari’s account of the reality of the concept as a self-positing intensive ordinate,

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103 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 90.

104 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 20, 91.

which is “defined by the inseparability of a finite number of heterogenous components traversed by a point of absolute survey at infinite speed.”

Ruyer associates the passive sense of organization with the kind of “step-by-step causality” that is typical of a manufactured machine, such as a motor vehicle or an automaton. He distinguishes this from the active sense of organization, which concerns the “origin and formation” of “living beings [that] are not ready-made” but rather, are “truly unified and organized” such that they cannot, by definition, “be reduced to a set of physical processes that propel or balance one another.”

We can expand on this distinction between the active and passive senses of organization through a similar differentiation that Ruyer makes in terms of what he refers to as modes of bonding. Ruyer explains that there exist two “extremely different” modes of bonding, which are nonetheless consistently conflated. There is, on the one hand, the step-by-step mode of bonding that pertains to machines, which achieve a unity only as a result of the bonding of its constitutive parts. A manufactured machine, like a car or chair, “does not float as a unity above its components.” In fact, Ruyer argues that the “unitary being” of the chair or car is, in a sense, borrowed from the craftsman or engineer who conceived and constructed it. A more primary unity is therefore found in such “domains of subjectivity,” like the craftsman

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106 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 21. The specific connection to the reality or ontological status of the concept is based on Deleuze and Guattari’s evaluation of Hegel’s notion of the concept, discussed above, in which they praise him for attending to the concept’s “philosophical reality” by determining the “autopoetic characteristic” of the concept that “thereby enjoys a self-posting of itself” (11). In addition, it is supported by a citation to Ruyer, in which Deleuze and Guattari refer to his account of “the survey and absolute surfaces or volumes as real beings” (*What is Philosophy?*, 220n2). See: Ruyer, *Neofinalism*, chapters 9-11.


108 Ruyer, *Neofinalism*, 82-83.


and engineer, in which the mode of bonding that characterizes living organisms—or what Ruyer calls “unitary domains of activity (cortical consciousness, embryonic and organic consciousness...)”—differs from the step-by-step mode of bonding.\footnote{Ruyer, Neofinalism, 108, 90.} Despite the notion of a bond seeming to entail the existence of bound parts, the mode of bonding in unitary domains of activity does not proceed according to the binding together of “dispersed elements,” like “the assemblage of bits and scraps” glued together in building the chair.\footnote{Ruyer, Neofinalism, 102.} Ruyer in fact uses the binding of glue as an example to demonstrate the mode of bonding that he comes to refer to as absolute bonds:

Let \(a\) and \(b\) be bound elements (that we can assume to be “binders” of other elements \(A\) and \(B\)). If they are simply juxtaposed…each absolutely enclosed on itself and each really “next” to the other, how can they be unified and how can they serve to unify \(A\) and \(B\)? But if their domains are superimposed on one another, and…if the domain of superimposition is at once \(a\) and \(b\), if it is \(ab\) considered as a new being with an autosubjectivity and a self-survey, then the bond can be understood.

In a very simple way, this example illustrates the nature of the mode of bonding in domains of absolute bonds as essentially \(ab\) bonds, as opposed to the \(a\) and \(b\) bonds of step-by-step phenomena.

We can further elucidate Ruyer’s notion of the active sense of organization and the mode of bonding in unitary domains of activity through his non-phenomenological account of “visual sensation as a state of consciousness,” in contrast to “perception as a physicophysiological event.”\footnote{Ruyer, Neofinalism, 91.} It is in this context that he introduces the notion of an absolute surface or survey. Perception, as a physico-physiological event, understands the perceiver or observer as being
“situated in the \( n+1 \) dimension to see at once all the component points of an \( n \)-dimensional being,” occupying, in other words, a position outside the “mise-en-scène of perception.”

Visual sensation, on the other hand, operates quite differently and avoids the infinite regress of dimensions needed to perceive oneself perceiving. In visual sensation, the individual does not “need to be outside of that sensation to sense it,” or be “in a perpendicular dimension [in order] to consider each and all the details of this sensation.” Visual sensation avoids the infinite regress since I do not need to be at a distance from the “I” of my visual sensation; I can “see” myself “seeing” without needing to be a separate “seeing thing” that “sees” the “seeing me.” As Ruyer explains, “I’ am simultaneously in all the locations of my visual field. There is no step-by-step propagation, no limit speed, for such a domain.”

In addition, all the details of my visual field are “immediately given in an absolute unity,” such that, while they remain “distinct from one another,” they are nonetheless, “not truly other for one another, because they constitute my unified sensation.” In visual sensation, “my visual field necessarily sees itself through an “absolute” or “nondimensional” survey. It surveys itself without positioning itself at a distance,” i.e., it is an “absolute domain of self-survey.” The particular type of absolute domain of self-survey that characterizes visual sensation is what

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114 Ruyer, Neofinalism, 91.

115 To illustrate the infinite regress of perception, Ruyer uses J. W. Dunne’s account of a man attempting to create a complete painting of the universe, who: “(1) first paints the landscape, (2) then realizes that he forgot himself and represents himself in the act of painting, (3) then realizes that he forgot to represent himself in the act of painting himself, and so forth” (Neofinalism, 92). See: Dunne, The Serial Universe (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1938), 29-32.

116 Ruyer, Neofinalism, 97, 91.

117 Ruyer, Neofinalism, 94.

118 Ruyer, Neofinalism, 93.

119 Ruyer, Neofinalism, 97, 104.
Ruyer calls an absolute surface.\textsuperscript{120} Ruyer uses the example of sitting at a marquetry table to illustrate how the visual sensation of the checkered squares of the table are not sensed as “\textit{partes extra partes},” i.e., my sensation of the absolute surface “is not composed of small squares glued together,” since the “internal bonds [\textit{liaison}] of an absolute domain” are not governed by the step-by-step mode of bonding that characterizes machines.\textsuperscript{121} Unlike the bonded parts of an automaton, “the internal bonds of domains,” such as the absolute surface of visual sensation, “do not explain the domains; on the contrary, it is the domains that explain the bonds.”\textsuperscript{122}

At this point, the various features of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept should start to resonate in this brief overview of Ruyer’s account of the self-survey of the absolute surface that characterizes visual sensation. Like the concept, which is “an intension present in all the features that make it up,” in visual sensation, “‘I’ am simultaneously in all the locations of my visual field.”\textsuperscript{123} The concept is in a state of survey in relation to its distinct yet inseparable components that are not \textit{partes extra partes}, while it simultaneously posits itself, an absolute self-survey that is not at a distance from that which is surveyed. As an absolute surface, the concept is not subject to the spatiotemporal determinations that pertain to extensive states of affairs.\textsuperscript{124} Similar to the way in which the “I” is in a state of absolute survey in relation to the details in the absolute surface of visual sensation, the concept is “endlessly traversing” its components: “It is

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\item \textsuperscript{120} Ruyer, \textit{Neofinalism}, 99-100.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ruyer, \textit{Neofinalism}, 91, 104.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Ruyer, \textit{Neofinalism}, 104.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 20; Ruyer, \textit{Neofinalism}, 94.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 21.
\end{itemize}
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immediately co-present to all its components or variations, at no distance from them, passing back and forth through them: it is a refrain, an opus with its number (chiffre).”

This description of the concept as a “refrain” [une ritournelle] or an “opus with its number” [un opus ayant son chiffre] is one of the more explicit examples of Deleuze and Guattari’s use of auditory or sonic language in general—and musical terms in particular cases—in their characterizations of the concept. One finds numerous instances throughout What is Philosophy?: concepts are centers of vibration that resonate with other concepts by throwing out moveable bridges. Furthermore, as a composite that is composed of heterogenous elements, the concept is itself a composition that has variations that vary the “theme” or “point of condensation” while always tracing back to it, like the variations of a musical composition that repeat the theme in an altered form. Accordingly, I conclude this section on the features of the concept by offering a brief interpretation of these references to musical and auditory language, highlighting possible reasons for Deleuze and Guattari’s preference for it.

One could attribute this choice of language to Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence that the concept is “an incorporeal, even though it is incarnated or effectuated in bodies.” Like the earlier clarification regarding the threads of yard metaphor, the use of auditory metaphors better captures the incorporeality of the concept, emphasizing how the concept only has intensive

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125 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 20-21.

126 Deleuze and Guattari, Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?, 26.

127 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 23. These passages are found in the original text as: “Les concepts sont des centres de vibrations…C’est pourquoi tout résonne….Ce sont des ponts mobiles.” (Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?, 28).

128 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 21.
relations and is not “mixed up with the states of affairs in which it is effectuated.” Moreover, the way in which the notes of a musical composition are not additive—each note is not a distinct, isolated part of a musical piece—but always in relation to the whole composition, reflects the ordinal relationality of the components of the concept. A musical composition is, in this way, a singularity that, like the concept, does not have parts that can be substituted without changing the relations that constitute the whole. Furthermore, describing the concept as a refrain or ritornello develops the relationality that is particular to the concept as an intensive ordinate: a song’s refrain is not a bare repetition as there are varying intensities with each repetition of the refrain within the context of the song.

The use of auditory language could also point to the concept’s relation to the virtual, a notion not yet explored but which plays a central role in Deleuze and Guattari’s work on structures and the specific ways in which structures are generative. In What is Philosophy?, Deleuze and Guattari apply the virtual to what they refer to as “chaos,” a notion I return to later. For the moment, what is important is the way in which the concept gives “the virtual a consistency specific to it,” while nonetheless retaining the infinite speeds that define chaos. Mader’s account of the virtual offers a sense of how the use of musical terminology might be relevant to this particular application of the virtual: “A structure necessarily ‘includes’ unactualized relations between its terms…It is not that everything is possible; it is that what is possible in the structure has a necessarily excessive possibility, relative to that which becomes

129 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 21.
130 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 118.
131 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 118.
actualized in the structure.” The concept’s variations can be seen as capturing this “excessive possibility”: the variations on a musical composition’s theme are what is actualized in the structure, yet these variations do not exhaust the possible thematic variations that could be actualized in terms of the theme’s melody, rhythm, harmony, timbre, etc. The concept’s components are likewise unexhausted by the “point of condensation” that runs through them. The components can themselves be concepts that branch out or be an intensive feature of different concepts on different planes of immanence.

Lastly, we find echoes of musical metaphors in Ruyer’s account of visual sensation in which he cautions against over-extending such metaphors beyond their purpose: “It is true that to perceive as well as to sing a melody, one has to live it in some sense. So be it, but we should not exaggerate: to hear a song and to participate in a chorus are still two distinct operations.”

While heeding this warning and not confusing the concept with a musical composition, we can nonetheless speculate that the concept, as an absolute surface that is “at no distance from [its components],” can be understood as participating in the chorus of its variations, rather than referring to—i.e., perceiving or listening to—the chorus of its components.

**Constructivism and the Plane of Immanence**

Given this elucidation of the features of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the concept, the pertinent question that emerges is: how are concepts created? As mentioned, concept creation is one of the three distinct activities involved in Deleuze and Guattari’s account of philosophy. The other two activities concern laying out a plane of immanence and inventing conceptual

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133 Ruyer, *Neofinalism*, 201.

personae. These three activities—creating, laying out and inventing—"constitute the philosophical trinity," with each activity’s respective “object” needing to be “constructed on its own account.” It is for this reason that Deleuze and Guattari define philosophy as “constructivism,” delineating the exclusive domain philosophy occupies according to its distinct constructions. Constructivism, moreover, is proposed in opposition to reflection, replacing the idea of philosophy as “the art of reflection.” Among the traditional conceptions of philosophy that Deleuze and Guattari reject—philosophy as contemplation, reflection, or communication—reflection not only fails, as do the others, to “constitute a well-defined occupation or precise activity.” It also ultimately leaves philosophy with nothing to offer, since, according to Deleuze and Guattari: “no one needs philosophy to reflect on anything. Mathematicians, as mathematicians, have never waited for philosophers before reflecting on mathematics, nor artists before reflecting on painting or music.” Constructivism, on the other hand, does constitute a precise activity that designates specifically philosophical creations.

Constructivism, in particular, primarily pertains to the activities of concept creation and laying out the plane of immanence as its “two qualitatively different complementary aspects.” Constructivism also has a counterpart in what Deleuze refers to as “expressionism,” which likewise aims to replace the position of communication in philosophy, by defining a concept as

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135 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 77, 82.
136 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 6.
137 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 7.
138 Deleuze, Negotiations, 147. The interview with Raymond Bellour and François Ewald that appears as the chapter, “On Philosophy” in Negotiations, takes place a few years before the publication of What is Philosophy?. It is clear, however, that Deleuze is working through the central themes of this book, which he mentions at the end of the conversation, anticipating that it will be “as long as it’s a short one” (155).
139 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 36.
“the expression of possible worlds,” as opposed to “universals of communication.” Deleuze identifies Spinoza and Leibniz as philosophy’s high points of expressionism, elaborating on the notion of “possible worlds” with somewhat enigmatic examples, such as, “someone with a toothache, and a Japanese man walking in the road.” The possible worlds that concepts express, furthermore, tend to be caught up in the “inextricable knots” of “social fields” and, for this reason, need conceptual personae to “disentangle them.” Accordingly, we can provisionally align concept creation and laying out the plane of immanence with constructivism, and the invention of conceptual personal with its counterpart of expressionism. This is mostly a preliminary, functional division that becomes blurred through understanding the way in which philosophy’s three activities are “strictly simultaneous and have only incommensurable relationships,” which the philosophical taste or faculty of coadaptation brings together. I return to Deleuze and Guattari’s account of coadaptation later in the analysis. First, however, it is necessary to expand on the activities that constitute the two aspects of constructivism, focusing in particular on the plane of immanence and its relation to concept creation.

As we have seen, the philosophical reality of concepts as self-positing entities negates the notion of concepts as pre-given unities. Concepts are creations, philosophical constructions that philosophy must create. However, concepts are not created in a void or in isolation. They are not constructions built upon a tabula rasa, so to speak. Concepts are always created on a plane of immanence, which they “pave, occupy, or populate…bit by bit,” such that “the only regions of

140 Deleuze, Negotiations, 147; Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 7.
141 Deleuze, Negotiations, 147.
142 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 68.
143 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 77-78.
the plane are concepts themselves, but the plane is all that holds them together.”\textsuperscript{144} The plane of immanence is not itself a concept and Deleuze and Guattari go to great lengths to distinguish the “strictly correlative” relation between the plane of immanence and the concepts that populate it, using metaphors such as the waves in the ocean, to illustrate this point: “Concepts are like multiple waves [\textit{les vagues multiples}], rising and falling, but the plane of immanence is the single wave [\textit{la vague unique}] that rolls them up and unrolls them.”\textsuperscript{145} Deleuze and Guattari invoke various other metaphors to capture this relation between concepts and the plane of immanence: concepts as “a spinal column” and the plane as “the breath that suffuses the separate parts;” the plane as a desert that concepts populate like “tribes.”\textsuperscript{146} Among these metaphors, the one that perhaps best elucidates the nature of the plane of immanence is not in terms of the plane’s relation to concepts, but rather its relation to chaos.

While it is not until the conclusion of \textit{What is Philosophy?} that the notion of chaos becomes the main focus of Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis, one can always sense it operating in the background, an incessant, initially menacing presence that the various features and elements in their account of philosophy “struggle against.”\textsuperscript{147} Deleuze and Guattari define chaos not in terms of disorder but “by the infinite speed with which every form taking shape in it vanishes….containing all possible particles…which spring up only to disappear immediately, without consistency or reference, without consequence.”\textsuperscript{148} In presenting this definition of chaos,

\textsuperscript{144} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 36.

\textsuperscript{145} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 36; \textit{Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?}, 38.

\textsuperscript{146} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 36.

\textsuperscript{147} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 203.

\textsuperscript{148} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 118.
Deleuze and Guattari explicitly draw on the notion of a superfused liquid, citing Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers’s example of a liquid below its crystallization temperature—i.e., the temperature at which a liquid would become a solid, such as the freezing temperature of water—that nonetheless remains a liquid as “small germs of crystals form…and then dissolve without involving any consequences.”¹⁴⁹ The failure of these germs of crystals to have an effect, appearing and dissolving without stimulating the process of crystallization that would transform the liquid into a solid, is reflected in Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of chaos as the infinite speed in which every form emerges only to immediately disappear.

Chaos plays a more prominent role in Part Two of *What is Philosophy?*, in which Deleuze and Guattari delineate the “respective fields of creation” associated with the disciplines of philosophy, science and art, distinguishing them, in part, according to the relation each has to chaos through the planes it lays out.¹⁵⁰ Philosophy’s relation to chaos, through the plane of immanence it lays out, aims to “retain infinite speeds while gaining consistency.”¹⁵¹ It is in this sense that the plane of immanence is described as functioning like a “philosophical sieve…that cuts through the chaos, selects infinite movements of thought and is filled with concepts formed like consistent particles going as fast as thought.”¹⁵² It is only by taking a section of chaos that philosophy is able to draw out connections, giving the infinite a consistency on which it can create concepts.


¹⁵¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 118.

¹⁵² Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 118.
Jeffrey Bell’s account of the plane of immanence in terms of what he calls the problem space, relates this need of filtering chaos through a philosophical sieve to the process of learning. As discussed earlier, learning requires that one be “confronted with the objecticity of a problem,” encountering the signs of the problem as singular points so as to “conjugate the distinctive points…in order to form a problematic field.” According to Bell, the plane of immanence makes encountering the objectivity of the problem possible by defining the conditions that constitute the problem space, or what Deleuze refers to as the “problematic field.” We can return to the previous example of learning to tie shoelaces to see how the conditions that constitute the problem space are determined as one encounters the singular points of the objectivity of the problem, such as the length and elasticity of the laces, the condition of one’s fingers and hands, etc. As one conjugates these distinctive points, forming the problematic field of shoelace tying, most things are filtered out: the weather in Fiji, the nature of the relationship between mental and physical properties, the mysteries of dark matter in the universe, etc. As “a filtering of chaos,” Bell explains that the plane of immanence is “the partial, fragmentary whole and problem space that is then drawn into the plane of consistency, or the ‘area ab,’ that is the condition for the possibility of determinate individuation.” This notion of the “area ab” recalls Ruyer’s example of gluing two elements together to illustrate how the absolute bond of ab is an instance of a domain of absolute survey. The plane of consistency is such an ab area in which the singular points of the problem space begin to congeal as the plane of immanence is “ceaselessly

153 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 164-165.

154 Bell, *Deleuze and Guattari’s “What is Philosophy?*”, 16, 45; Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 165.

155 Bell, *Deleuze and Guattari’s “What is Philosophy?*”, 75.
being woven.” In terms of the phenomenon of a superfused liquid, the germs of crystals that formed without having any consequences are what Bell calls “pre-individuated singularities” that are only able to have effects once the plane of immanence is laid out, thereby making possible determinate individuals. In the case of philosophy, the plane of immanence is the condition for the possibility of creating the determinate connections that define the concept’s endoconsistency and exoconsistency.

The Dogmatic Image of Thought

In cutting across a section of chaos, the plane of immanence’s relation to thought was alluded to in the way in which it “selects infinite movements of thought.” There is, however, a deeper and more profound sense in which the plane of immanence relates to thought and, specifically, philosophical thought. We can thus, once more, indirectly approach the relation between concepts and the plane of immanence through the relation between the plane of immanence and philosophy. We saw before how the plane of immanence mediates philosophy’s relation to chaos by serving as a “philosophical sieve” that makes determinate connections possible through delineating what Bell referred to as the “problem space.” In addition to this mediating role, the plane of immanence is also defined as philosophy’s “image of thought,” and, as such, operates as the pre-philosophical element that constitutes philosophy’s “absolute ground” and “the foundation on which [philosophy] creates concepts.” Deleuze developed the

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156 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 38.

157 Bell, Deleuze and Guattari’s “What is Philosophy?”, 75.

158 *What is Philosophy?*, 118.

159 Bell, Deleuze and Guattari’s “What is Philosophy?”, 16.

160 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 41.
notion of the image of thought in *Difference and Repetition*, in which he presents and critiques what he refers to as philosophy’s dogmatic image of thought, something we will return to shortly. In *What is Philosophy?*, we are first introduced to the image of thought in the following passage:

The plane of immanence is not a concept that is or can be thought [n'est pas un concept pensé ni pensable] but rather the image of thought, the image thought gives itself of what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find one’s bearings in thought. It is not a method, since every method is concerned with concepts and presupposes such an image…The image of thought retains only what thought can claim by right…What thought claims by right, what it selects, is infinite movement or the movement of the infinite. It is this that constitutes the image of thought.161

As the image of thought, the plane of immanence operates as philosophy’s nonconceptual presupposition of what it means to think. As before, the plane of immanence is the condition for the possibility of concept creation. However, laying out the plane of immanence is not, according to Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy’s beginning: “if philosophy begins with the creation of concepts, then the plane of immanence must be regarded as prephilosophical,” and, specifically as philosophy’s “instituting [instauration].”162 On account of this pre-philosophical instituting of philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that “the nonphilosophical is perhaps closer to the heart of philosophy than philosophy itself.”163 The only other reference to this notion of the nonphilosophical in *What is Philosophy?* appears in the final passage of the text, in which Deleuze and Guattari write: “The plane of philosophy is prephilosophical insofar as we consider

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161 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 37.

162 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 40-41. Deleuze and Guattari cite Étienne Souriau’s notion of *L’instauration philosophique* in reference to a “plane of instituting as the ground” of philosophy’s creative activity (*What is Philosophy?*, 220n6). See also: Leonard Lawlor, “A Note on the Relation between Étienne Souriau’s *L’instauration philosophique* and Deleuze and Guattari’s *What is Philosophy?*,” *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* 5, no.3 (2011): 400-406. Lawlor elucidates the nuances of Sauriau’s use of the term *instauration,* which he argues are covered over by its English translation as ‘institution’

163 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 41.
it in itself independently of the concepts that come to occupy it, but nonphilosophy is found where the plane confronts chaos.”¹⁶⁴ François Laruelle’s text, Philosophy and Non-Philosophy, is cited in footnotes for both passages in which the nonphilosophical is mentioned, suggesting that Laruelle’s position—that the internal structure of philosophy is fundamentally rooted in the nonphilosophical—is “close to Spinoza.”¹⁶⁵ While no further explanation is given regarding the nature of this “closeness,” claims made by Deleuze in other texts offer some indication. For instance, Deleuze claims that “the philosopher and the nonphilosopher” are brought together “as one and the same being,” in Part V of Spinoza’s Ethics, praising the “extraordinary…way in which the meeting of concept and affect occurs there.”¹⁶⁶ This sentiment is echoed in Negotiations, in which Deleuze describes percepts and affects as dimensions of concepts, positing all three—percepts, affects and concepts—as “inseparable forces, running from art into philosophy and from philosophy into art.”¹⁶⁷ However, this relation of the philosophical and the nonphilosophical, the concept and the affect/percept, is not simply posited in the abstract. In discussing his experience of teaching both philosophers and nonphilosophers alike, Deleuze notes that it was in such settings that he “realized how much philosophy needs not only a philosophical understanding, through concepts, but a nonphilosophical understanding, rooted in percepts and affects. You need both. Philosophy has an essential and positive relation to nonphilosophy: it speaks directly to nonphilosophers.”¹⁶⁸ Alongside Nietzsche, Deleuze again

¹⁶⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 218.

¹⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 41n5; François Laruelle, Philosophy and Non-Philosophy, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2013).


¹⁶⁷ Deleuze, Negotiations, 137.

¹⁶⁸ Deleuze, Negotiations, 139-140.
cites Spinoza—and the *Ethics* in particular—as philosophers who speak to everyone. Based on these various claims, one can understand Deleuze and Guattari’s claim about the nonphilosophical being at the heart of philosophy as seeking to complicate the traditional divisions between the conceptual and the affective, the philosophical and the artistic or creative, by positing “essential and positive” relations between them.\(^{169}\)

It is in a similar manner that we can interpret Deleuze and Guattari’s claim that the plane of immanence is, “at the same time, that which must be thought and that which cannot be thought. It is the nonthought within thought.”\(^{170}\) The tension found in both the possibility of the impossible and the non-philosophical that is at the heart of the philosophical is ultimately a generative tension insofar as it constitutes what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as “the supreme act of philosophy: not so much to think THE plane of immanence as to show that it is there, unthought in every plane…as the not-external outside and the not-internal inside—that which cannot be thought and yet must be thought.”\(^{171}\)

One can read “The Image of Thought” chapter of *Difference and Repetition* as an effort to achieve this “supreme act of philosophy,” by not only showing the plane of immanence “that is there,” guiding the creation of concepts, but also “by putting into question the traditional image of thought,” which tacitly “determines our goals when we try to think.”\(^{172}\) By questioning philosophy’s traditional image of thought, Deleuze ultimately aims to achieve “a liberation of

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\(^{169}\) Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 139-140.

\(^{170}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 41, 59.

\(^{171}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 59-60. According to Deleuze and Guattari, only Spinoza has thought the plane of immanence, thereby demonstrating “the possibility of the impossible,” by thinking “the ‘best’ plane of immanence,” since it was pure immanence, immanence that is immanent to itself and refusing to “hand itself over to the transcendent.” *What is Philosophy*, 60.

\(^{172}\) Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, xvi.
thought from those images which imprison it.”173 Just as Descartes’s cogito was used to illustrate the features of the concept, we can here again use the dogmatic image of thought—most prominently, though not exclusively, exemplified in Cartesianism—to illustrate the plane of immanence.

The primary characteristic of the dogmatic image is the presupposition that thought is “the natural exercise of a faculty…endowed with a talent for truth or an affinity with the true,” thereby conferring “a good will on the part of the thinker and an upright nature [a common sense] on the part of thought.”174 It is in terms of this dogmatic image of thought, in which the thinker possesses a natural capacity for and affinity with truth through the common sense of thought, that “everybody knows and is presumed to know what it means to think,” especially the philosopher.175 Such an image of thought, most explicitly set out by Descartes in Discourse on Method, has generally plagued philosophy, according to Deleuze, allowing philosophy to be comfortably ensconced in its own assumed moral goodness through this presupposed affinity for truth. Few philosophers have questioned the dogmatic image of thought, with the exception of Nietzsche due to his willingness to challenge the moral presuppositions that philosophy has of itself and its relation to the true and the good. Taking inspiration from Nietzsche, Deleuze seeks to show the image of thought “that is there,”—operating as “a single Image in general which constitutes the subjective presupposition of philosophy as a whole” of what it means to think—by outlining eight postulates that characterize the dogmatic image of thought.176

173 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, xvii.
174 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 131.
175 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 131.
176 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 132.
Each postulate is distinguished according to two forms or illusions: 1) a natural illusion, which appears “in the arbitrariness of examples,” and generally pertains to its more commonplace manifestations and the social/cultural context that supports and maintains it; and 2) a philosophical illusion, which appears “in the presuppositions of the essence,” and primarily concerns the illusion’s “technical character” exhibited by specialists in various academic fields.¹⁷⁷ For the purposes of this analysis, I focus specifically on the seventh and eighth postulates, using the former to further clarify the relation between the plane of immanence and concepts, and the latter to introduce Deleuze’s critique of method.

In the seventh postulate of modality or solutions, the two aspects of the illusion are defined as follows: the natural illusion “involves tracing problems from supposedly pre-existent propositions, logical opinions, geometrical theorems, algebraic equations, physical hypotheses or transcendental judgements;” and the philosophical illusion “involves evaluating problems according to their ‘solvability’—in other words, according to the extrinsic and variable form of the possibility of their finding a solution.”¹⁷⁸ Both aspects of the illusion ultimately fail to grasp what Deleuze calls “the internal character of the problem,” insofar as each, in different ways, subordinates problems to their solutions.¹⁷⁹ With regards to the natural manifestation, there is a set of epistemological assumptions that support the illusion, all of which originate from “puerile examples taken out of context and arbitrarily erected into models”: the belief that problems are “ready-made” and that “they disappear in the responses or solution;” that thinking “begins only

¹⁷⁷ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 167, 159.

¹⁷⁸ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 161.

¹⁷⁹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 161.
with the search for solutions,” and that truth and falsity only apply to solutions. These beliefs are sustained and perpetuated by a “grotesque image of culture” that has an interest in “maintaining us in an infantile state,” cultivating passive, slavish “thinkers” who are simply expected to provide responses to problems “that come from elsewhere” and are evaluated in their search for solutions by a “powerful authority,” upon whom they are dependent, as the controllers of problems, for the genesis of the act of thinking, which is all that is assumed to be “valuable in thought.” There are moments when the façade drops and the illusion is revealed, such as when “a false problem is ‘set’ in a science examination.” But even when the master that writes the master text is acknowledged as “necessarily fallible” or problems are recognized as “the most important thing,” pedagogically, these are merely superficial deviations. Problems continue to be instrumentalized as the means to attaining knowledge, with the importance of problems derived from “the negative empirical conditions imposed upon the knowing subject,” that is to say, the problem persists but only as “indicative of the momentary ignorance of an empirical subject.” At its core, however, the natural illusion persists in attributing truth and falsity to solutions when, according to Deleuze, “truth and falsehood primarily affects problems. A solution always has the truth it deserves according to the problem to which it is a response, and

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180 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 158.

181 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 158.

182 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 158.

183 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 158-159.

184 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 159, 106.
the problem always has the solution it deserves in proportion to its own truth or falsity…to its sense.”

The philosophical illusion is distinguished from the natural illusion insofar as it applies truth and falsity to problems and not just solutions. However, in doing so, it continues to hold onto the belief that “the truth of a problem consists only in the possibility that it receive a solution.” It is this belief—found in both aspects of the illusion—that reveals the role propositions play in the seventh postulate. The technical character of the illusion relates to the fact that the possibility of finding a solution is “modelled upon the form of possibility of propositions.” We find this aspect of the illusion in Aristotle, who, “in order to judge a problem…invites us to consider ‘the opinions accepted by all men or by the majority among them, or by the wise’ in order to relate these to general (predicable) points of view, and thereby form the places which allow them to be established or refuted in discussion.” Problems are thereby reduced to propositions: if the truth of the problem is conditioned by the possibility of its solution, and only propositions are seen as “capable of serving as cases of solution,” then the truth of the problem will be traced from the propositions that designate these cases of possible solutions. Both aspects of the illusion of the seventh postulate ultimately derive from the subordination of problems to solutions: problems are either instrumentalized as simply the means to obtaining solutions, which are held—explicitly or implicitly—as what is actually valuable in

185 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 159.

186 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 159.

187 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 160.

188 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 160.

189 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 160.
thought, or problems are traced from the propositional form of possibility as cases of their solutions.

Deleuze develops the notion that truth and falsity primarily concern problems and not solutions in his engagement with Bergson’s philosophy in *Bergsonism*, praising the particular way Bergson sought to establish the truth and falsity of problems. Rather than determining the falsity of a problem extrinsically, in terms of the impossibility of its solution, as is the case in the philosophical illusion of the seventh postulate, Bergson attempted to demonstrate “an intrinsic determination of the false in the expression ‘false problem.’”¹⁹⁰ In identifying criteria for truth and falsity that are immanent to the problem, we can see how Bergson’s account of false problems aligns with Deleuze’s own emphasis on the importance of attending to the internal structure of problems, which he argues is different in kind from that of solutions. With this initial compatibility in terms of the general approach to evaluating the nature of problems, Deleuze takes up Bergson’s distinction between two kinds of false problems. The first kind of false problem concerns “badly stated questions,” which include terms that “arbitrarily group things that differ in kind,” and for this reason represent cases of “badly analyzed composites.”¹⁹¹ One example Bergson uses to illustrate badly analyzed composites is the question, “Is pleasure happiness or not?,” explaining how the terms “pleasure” and “happiness” are general ideas, representing things that have been grouped together under the same name but that, upon further

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¹⁹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 17. I present here Deleuze’s exposition of Bergson’s account of false problems, citing Bergson directly in order to clarify through the use of examples that illustrate the nature of false problems. The question, however, as to whether Deleuze correctly represents Bergson’s arguments is beyond the scope of this analysis.

¹⁹¹ Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 18.
analysis, represent groupings that are artificial or mere conventions. For instance, “suppose that in examining the states grouped under the name of pleasure are found to have nothing in common except that they are states which man is seeking: humanity will have classified these very different things in one genus because it found them of the same practical interest and reacted toward all of them in the same way.” If, in responding to such a question, one aims to do more than “re-examining conventions,” seeking instead to “[grasp] realities,” then the badly analyzed composites must be reassessed, dissolving the original question into an entirely new set of questions.

Nonexistent problems designate the second kind of false problem, which are “defined as problems whose very terms contain a confusion of the ‘more’ and the ‘less.’” Nonexistent problems emerge from the pervasive tendency to conceive of nonbeing, for instance, as less than being, disorder as less than order, and the possible as less than the real. Bergson argues, however, that the idea of nonbeing is actually more than the idea of being, since it includes: 1) the idea of being, 2) the negation of the idea of being, and 3) the psychological motive for this negation, e.g., “such as when a being does not correspond to our expectations and we grasp it purely as the lack, the absence of what interests us.” The same applies to the idea of disorder and the idea of the possible. In all these examples, not only is the more mistaken for the less, but there is also the assumption that nonbeing precedes being, “as though being came to fill in a

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195 Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 17.

196 Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 17.
void,” that disorder existed before order, or that the possible comes before the real. This assumption reveals a “fundamental illusion” at the base of nonexistent problems in which “being, order and the existent are supposed to precede themselves…by projecting an image of themselves back into a possibility, a disorder, a nonbeing which are supposed to be primordial.”

Ultimately, however, one discovers that these are not actually two different kinds of false problems, but simply different aspects of the same fundamental illusion that corresponds to both aspects of the false problem. In particular, one finds that nonexistent problems depend on badly analyzed composites since, “each time we think in terms of the more or less, we have already disregarded the differences in kind.” For instance, instead of thinking of disorder as the simple negation or absence of order, we should see order and disorder as “two or more irreducible orders, each present when the other is absent.” The central issue illustrated in all these cases, according to Deleuze, is the “obsession in all aspects with thinking in terms of more and less,” which ultimately leads us to disregard differences in kind, “seeing nothing but differences in degree.”

From this overview of Bergson’s notion of false problems, one can expect that badly stated questions and nonexistent problems will not be conducive to the creation of concepts by failing to provide the requisite ‘fertile ground,’ so to speak, for creating well-formed concepts that acquire the consistency necessary for being conceptually generative. The critical question,

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197 Deleuze, Bergsonism, 18.

198 Deleuze, Bergsonism, 20.

199 Deleuze, Bergsonism, 19.

200 Deleuze, Bergsonism, 20.
therefore, is whether there is a way for philosophy to avoid such false problems, such as a process or method for constituting problems that are generative of concept creation? To answer this, we must first turn to the eighth and final postulate of the dogmatic image of thought.

Similar to the subordination of problems to solutions found in the seventh postulate, the eighth postulate involves a set of assumptions that subordinate learning to knowledge. Learning is either instrumentalized as “only the intermediary between non-knowledge and knowledge, the living passage from one to the other,” or the features that characterize knowledge as, “the calm possession of a rule enabling solutions,” are retroactively projected onto learning such that “the final truth, when it is obtained, emerges as though it were the limit of a problem completely determined and entirely understood.”

201 These two ways of subordinating learning to knowledge correspond, respectively, to the natural and philosophical illusions of the eighth postulate. The philosophical form of the illusion develops in a similar way to the philosophical illusion of the seventh postulate. In the case of the seventh postulate, the natural aspect of the illusion is mediated in the philosophical aspect by applying truth and falsity to problems. For the eighth postulate, the natural illusion that instrumentalizes learning as merely the means to knowledge is abated by an appreciation for the “importance and dignity of learning,” which sometimes even includes allusions to “the specificity of learning,” such as when learning is said to be “an infinite task.”

202 Nonetheless, just as the illusion of the seventh postulate persists in its philosophical aspect by defining the truth and falsity of problems in terms of the propositional form of possibility of their solutions, the illusion remains in the philosophical aspect of the eighth

201 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 164-166.

202 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 166.
postulate by projecting “the circumstances and the acquisition of knowledge” onto learning. The process of learning, or what Deleuze calls apprenticeship, is retroactively cast in the image of knowledge, with the conditions of learning resembling those of knowledge as “the calm possession of a rule enabling solutions,” thereby maintaining the subordination of learning to knowledge.

This difference between the process of learning and the acquisition of knowledge can be further illustrated through an example of the experience of learning a new skill, such as pottery. One can, for instance, be told the steps of throwing a bowl on a pottery wheel: center the clay on the wheel; use both thumbs to make a hole in the middle of the clay; gently pull the clay up, raising it by squeezing and lifting the sides to achieve desired thickness and height, etc. Despite following these steps exactly, a person learning pottery will most likely create many odd-shaped bowls in the beginning. It is only after repeated practice that one begins to get a sense of where to shift the weight of their body when centering the clay, how to adjust the pressure in pulling the edges with their fingers, wetting their hands enough so the friction does not decenter the bowl but not too much, etc. Possessing the “rule of pottery” by knowing the steps is not equivalent to the process of conjugating the distinctive points of the body to the singular points of the objectivity of the problem space. No rule is adequate to learning the instinctive feel for adjusting the tension in one’s fingers in relation to the pliability of the clay or the speed of the wheel; bowls collapse, holes are accidentally made, and clay returns to mud in moments of frustration in the process of learning. Even if after one has mastered such skills and the steps of the process seem to easily flow, as if one always knew how it was done, the process of learning itself does

203 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 164.
not resemble “the calm possession of a rule,” but is only retroactively cast in this image of knowledge.

We can see how the philosophical aspect of the seventh and eighth postulates ostensibly amends the natural aspect of the illusion, while nonetheless maintaining the fundamental illusion that underlies the dogmatic image of thought. In order to deepen our understanding of this fundamental illusion, a comparison can be drawn between the natural/philosophical illusions of both postulates and the two aspects of the illusion in Bergson’s notion of the false problem. The natural illusion relates to nonexistent problems that confuse ‘the more and the less,’ insofar as problems are assumed to be less than their solutions, learning as less than knowledge. The philosophical illusion attempts to correct this confusion of the more and the less by applying truth and falsity to problems or recognizing the dignity of learning as an infinite task. The technical aspect of the illusion nonetheless persists by disregarding differences in kind. By deriving the truth and falsity of problems from the possibility of the propositional form of their solutions, the differences in kind between problems and solutions are covered up. When the process of learning is represented as the calm possession of a rule, it is distinguished from knowledge only in terms of differences in degree, concealing how learning is different in kind from knowledge. Such differences in kind are what lead Deleuze to argue that the conditions of thought—“the act of thinking in thought”—do not resemble the circumstances that characterize the acquisition of knowledge. Thought, on the contrary, is conditioned by “an involuntary adventure,” “a violent training, a culture or paideia.” Such an involuntary adventure precludes the possibility of there being a method for learning since, according to Deleuze, “we never know

204 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 97.

205 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 165.
in advance how someone will learn: by means of what loves someone becomes good at Latin, what encounters make them a philosopher, or in what dictionaries they learn to think.”\textsuperscript{206} Thus, by assuming that the conditions of thought resemble the circumstances of knowledge, the eighth postulate ultimately involves both the subordination of learning to knowledge and, as a consequence, the subordination of culture to method.

**Critique of Method**

We find in the eighth postulate of the dogmatic image of thought the general threads of Deleuze’s critique of method. Based on this initial formulation, his critique of method can be broadly outlined as follows: the process of learning involves constituting problems by conjugating the signs or singular points that “cause problems,” in order to form a problematic field.\textsuperscript{207} But the “conditions under which the problem is determined as a problem” are not generated subjectively, solely within the mind of the thinker. There is “an objectivity of conditions, which implies that…problems do not exist only in our heads but occur here and there in the production of an actual historical world.”\textsuperscript{208} Accordingly, there is no procedure or set of steps, i.e., method, that one can follow for constituting a problem, since the “objectivity of conditions” through which a problem will be determined as a problem cannot be predetermined. It is, in this respect, that the constitution of problems involves an ineliminable element of

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\textsuperscript{206} Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 165.

\textsuperscript{207} Deleuze’s use of “conjugate” [conjuguer] to describe the process of forming a problematic field is notable in both its biological and grammatical senses. Unicellular organisms exchange genetic material by conjugating or temporarily joining together similar to the way in which the singular points of the field of immanence are drawn together into a field of consistency to create concepts but also, more fundamentally, to generate thought “by engendering thinking in thought,” or what Deleuze refers to as the “genitality of thinking” (*Difference and Repetition*, 147, 266). The grammatical sense of conjugate in terms of the variations of a verb according to the voice, mood, tense, number and person of the context in which it is used likewise captures the intensive variations of the concept’s components that consist or conjugate together.

\textsuperscript{208} Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 159, 190.
contingency, which explains, in part, Deleuze’s claim that learning and the act of thinking require “an involuntary adventure,” a culture or *paideia*. The seventh and eighth postulates of the dogmatic image of thought ultimately suppress this element of contingency by subordinating problems to solutions, learning to knowledge, and culture to method. The dogmatic image of thought instead relies on the presupposed good will of the thinker and the common sense of thought to dependably guide thought down the right, i.e., error-free, path to truth. It is not clear, however, based on this general outline, whether Deleuze’s critique of method applies only within the context of the dogmatic image of thought, or if it concerns all methods. In other words, does method *necessarily* subordinate culture or are there certain methods or conceptions of method that escape Deleuze’s critique? Can method adequately accommodate the contingency in the constitution of problems and the “involuntary adventure” of thinking? To answer these questions, we need to deepen our understanding of Deleuze’s critique.

We can restate Deleuze’s critique of method in terms of two distinct, yet interrelated aspects that constitute the conditions of thought or, more specifically, the conditions of engendering thinking in thought: 1) the *constraint* of culture and, 2) the *contingency* of encountering that which forces us to think. Method, according to Deleuze, undermines both aspects: “method is an artifice” employed to “[overcome] the external influences that distract the mind,” replacing the constraint of culture with method’s own contrived forms of constraint. Moreover, by functioning as an artifice, method makes thought dependent on a premeditated or explicit decision to think, thereby suppressing the contingency of the encounter that is the

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209 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 165.

condition for thinking to be engendered in thought. While clearly interrelated, both aspects of the critique of method can be elucidated separately according to the key figures that influence Deleuze’s account of thinking. The role of culture as an external influence on thinking is explicitly drawn from Nietzsche, which Deleuze further develops in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. While Deleuze mentions the contingency of thinking in various texts, it is particularly emphasized in his engagement with Proust in *Proust and Signs*.212

There are a few ways in which Nietzsche’s analysis of philosophy closely aligns with Deleuze’s own position. For instance, the central themes of Nietzsche’s genealogical analysis of good and evil, such as calling into question the will to truth and the unquestioned presuppositions of morality, are reflected throughout Deleuze’s account of the dogmatic image of thought and its presuppositions concerning the good will of the thinker who “wants and loves truth (truthfulness of the thinker).”213 Nietzsche’s account of the manifestations of the will to power in active and reactive forces is particularly influential on Deleuze’s account of thought and his critique of method. This is evident, for instance, in Deleuze’s interpretation of Nietzsche as proposing “a new image of thought.”214 Rather than the dogmatic image’s conception of truth as an abstract universal, this new image takes truth to be “entirely undetermined. Everything depends on the

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211 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 108.

212 See also: Miguel de Beistegui, *Immanence: Deleuze and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010). In the first chapter, “Noology,” de Beistegui presents a similar comparison between the influence of Nietzsche and Proust on Deleuze and the development of the notion of a new image of thought. De Beistegui seeks to demonstrate how the “new” image of thought that Deleuze identifies in Nietzsche and Proust is not reducible to the plane of immanence as presented in *What is Philosophy?* (10-13n10).


value and sense of what we think.” Moreover, this new image does not posit thinking as the natural exercise of a faculty but instead claims that “thought cannot think by itself,” and thinking, as a consequence, “depends on forces which take hold of thought…Thinking means the activity of thought; but thought has its own ways of being inactive which can occupy it and all its forces entirely.” Thought must be constrained to think, forced to become something active by “a power” or “a violence” that “[throws] it into a becoming-active.” The use of the French term ‘violence’ is perhaps better understood as an impact or a shock that propels or stimulates a result, such as the expression, faire violence, meaning “to force” or “constrain to do something.” The thinker, in other words, requires something outside of herself, external to thought, that will cause a shock or impact and will impel thought, spurring on the activity of thinking.

Nietzsche identifies culture as those forces that, according to Deleuze, “seize hold of thought in order to make it something affirmative and active,” distinguishing these active forces of culture from its other common associations. Among the forces that are a “species of misemployed and appropriated culture,” Nietzsche includes: the greed of the money-makers, who promote education “in the interest of general money-making and world commerce;” the greed of the state, which seeks to universalize culture only to “the extent that will serve the interests of existing institutions” and give it a competitive advantage with other states; those that use culture “for prettifying life,” cloaking themselves in the arts, music, cuisine, etc., in order to conceal their own “ugly or boring content;” and finally, the greed of the sciences and the

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215 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 104.
scholars that serve them, who seek “cold, pure, inconsequential knowledge” and are ultimately “the servant of truth.”\textsuperscript{219} In diverting the active forces of culture to “benefit reactive forces” and promote their own interests, each of these powers fail to recognize the true goal of culture: “the production of the genius.”\textsuperscript{220}

According to Deleuze, the new image of thought that Nietzsche develops involves “a typology” of the active forces that “make thought something active and affirmative.”\textsuperscript{221} Importantly, however, this typology of forces “begins with a topology” that consists of the coordinates of the place, time and element upon which thought depends: “We have the truths that we deserve depending on the places we are carrying our existence to, the time we watch over and the element that we frequent.”\textsuperscript{222} To further illustrate this topology of forces, Deleuze and Nietzsche both refer to the Greek notion of \textit{paideia} as exemplifying a pedagogy of thinking or a training of “learning to \textit{think}” that emphasizes the kind of forces “which give food for thought.”\textsuperscript{223} In “Geophilosophy,” the fourth chapter of \textit{What is Philosophy?}, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the “recognized fact” of ancient Greek philosophy as designating the time of philosophy’s birth, with Greece as “the philosopher’s territory” is “marked by detours and contingency.”\textsuperscript{224} These “detours and contingency” in fact constitute the coordinates of the Greek topology of thought, which Deleuze and Guattari describe in terms of the “fractal structure” of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[219] Nietzsche, \textit{Untimely Meditation}, 164-174.
\item[221] Deleuze, \textit{Nietzsche and Philosophy}, 110.
\item[222] Deleuze, \textit{Nietzsche and Philosophy}, 110.
\item[224] Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?}, 86-88.
\end{footnotes}
the geography of Greece, as well as the distance of ancient Greek commercial cities from “archaic eastern empires” so as to be able to both “benefit from them without following their model.” Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari outline three features of the “Greek milieu” that constitute the “de facto conditions of philosophy”: 1) immanence in the form of “an ‘intrinsic nature of association,’ which is opposed to imperial sovereignty;” 2) friendship through “a certain pleasure in forming associations…but also a pleasure in breaking up the association, which constitutes rivalry;” and 3) opinion as “a taste for the exchange of views, for conversation,” which would be “inconceivable in an empire.”

Such contingencies constitute the coordinates upon which Greek thought depended and were the conditions out of which a paideia emerged that forced thought to think. The contestation of views, the associations of friendship and the rivalries that fractured such formations were the catalysts for thinking in the Greek milieu. It is through these features that what Nietzsche calls an “atmosphere” is formed, emerging like “a mysterious misty vapor,” an “envelope” that nourishes the active forces necessary for thinking.

Such forces, according to Deleuze and Nietzsche, are subordinated by method and the premeditated decision to think. There are reasons, however, to suspect that this critique might not apply absolutely. For one, the critique seems to primarily concern the way in which method is employed in the dogmatic image of thought. Deleuze explains: “Method is an artifice but one through which we are brought back to the nature of thought, through which we adhere to this nature and ward off the effect of the alien forces which alter it and distract us. Through method

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225 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 87.

226 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 87-88.

we ward off error. Time and place matter little if we apply method: it enables us to enter the
domain of ‘that which is valid for all times and places.’”  But method does not need to be such
an artifice. Method could be employed so as to magnify time and place, rather than diminish
them. This is, in fact, the case with the method of dramatization that Deleuze attributes to
Nietzsche, praising it as “the only method adequate to Nietzsche’s project and to the form of the
questions that he puts.” Nietzsche’s method, according to Deleuze, “is essentially pluralist and
immanent.” But what is it about Nietzsche’s method of dramatization that enables it to escape
the hazards of method found in the dogmatic image of thought? How is Nietzsche’s method
immanent and not merely an artifice that suppresses the active forces of culture?

While the method of dramatization specifically seeks to amplify such forces, determining
“the quality of the will to power, the nuance of this quality and the corresponding relation of
forces,” this is not the only reason why it is an exception to Deleuze’s critique of method.
What is also relevant is the specific way Nietzsche arrives at—or rather gives rise to—the
method of dramatization, according to Deleuze. Rather than taking up the traditional
metaphysical question, “what is?” Nietzsche pursued an altogether different question: “which
one?” Such a question, Deleuze argues, seeks to uncover the forces that determine the
sense and value of a thing: “which forces, which will?” Thus, perhaps more important that the
specific project of dramatizing the forces of culture, Nietzsche’s method is able to avoid the

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228 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 103.
229 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 79.
230 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 119
231 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 79.
232 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 77.
critique of method on account of it emerging from not just any question, but from a particular form of the question. As we saw earlier, while Deleuze and Guattari might have chosen—perhaps ironically—the metaphysical question “what is philosophy?” as the title of their final co-authored book, the contents of the text ultimately offer responses to the spatiotemporal questions, who, how, where and when. Using Nietzsche’s method of dramatization as an example, we can speculate that methods derived from spatiotemporal forms of questions, like Nietzsche’s own “tragic question,” qui?, will be methods that avoid Deleuze critique in the dogmatic image of thought by, at the very least, being less likely to subordinate the active forces of culture that are the condition for thought. If this is the case, then methods do not necessarily subordinate culture, which implies that Deleuze’s critique does not apply to all methods, but only to those that sustain the illusions in the dogmatic image of thought.

In other texts, Deleuze adapts Nietzsche’s notion of the forces of culture into what he comes to refer to as the encounter with the sign. While the concept of the sign is developed in different ways among the various texts by Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari, in general, signs are fundamentally related to the sensible, with the sign defined as that which “can only be sensed.” Accordingly, by emphasizing the importance of the encounter with the sign for thought, Deleuze seeks to locate the origins or conditions of thinking in sensation, developing an

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233 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 140. Signs are also characterized as “habitudes or contractions” that “always belong to the present,” on account of the way in which signs “envelop heterogenous elements and animate behavior” (Difference and Repetition, 73, 77). Deleuze illustrates this temporal aspect of signs through the example of a scar: “A scar is the sign not of a past wound but of ‘the present fact of having been wounded’: we can say that it is the contemplation of the wound, that it contracts all the instants which separate us from it into a living present” (77). See also: Daniel Smith, Essays on Deleuze, in which he presents Deleuze’s theory of signs in relation to Plato’s account of sensations as that which “riots the soul, renders it perplexed, as if the encountered sign were the bearer of a problem” (20). He also defines it as that which constitutes “the limit of the faculty of sensibility,” thereby distinguishing it from Kant’s theory of sensibility in terms of the following: “the element of sensation must be found in the sign and not the qualities of a recognizable object; the sign is the limit-object of the faculty of sensibility, beyond the postulates of recognition and common sense; the Idea of sensibility is constituted by differential relations and differences in intensity, which give a genetic account of thought and constitute the conditions of real, and not merely possible experience, since the conditions are never larger than what they condition” (94-97).
The concept of the sign is the particular focal point in Deleuze’s engagement with Proust’s novel, *In Search of Lost Time*, which Deleuze characterizes as an “apprenticeship to signs.” As we have seen, an apprenticeship always emerges in relation to a problem—“when one is confronted with the objecticity of a problem”—and the problem that drives the apprenticeship of the *Search* is “the problem of signs in general and that the signs constitute different worlds, worldly signs, empty signs, deceptive signs of love, sensuous material signs, and lastly the essential signs of art.” It is for this reason that Deleuze describes the *Search* as “a symptomatology of different worlds,” in which Proust explores “all the different kinds of signs, whose natures have to be discovered by looking at their setting, the way they’re emitted, their matter, their system.” An apprenticeship to signs therefore involves learning how to discover the nature of signs by becoming sensitive to the sign, developing a sensibility for the sign as a symptom of a world. Our earlier example of pottery detailed the process of learning to become sensitive to the signs of the clay in becoming a potter, as is the case with other vocations: “One becomes a carpenter only by becoming sensitive to the signs of wood, a physician by becoming sensitive to the signs of disease.” But there are also less obvious kinds of apprenticeship, such as an apprenticeship to the signs of love that is exemplified, according to Deleuze, in the “Charlus-Jupien encounter” in the *Search*. In this “most prodigious exchange of

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234 This notion of an *aisthesis* of thought is based on Deleuze’s discussion of the encounter with that which forces thought to think in *Difference and Repetition*, in which he explains: “The object of encounter, on the other hand, really gives rise to sensibility with regard to a given sense. It is not an *aistheton* but an *aisthēteon*. It is not a quality but a sign. It is not a sensible being but the being of the sensible. It is not the given but that by which the given is given” (139-140).


237 Deleuze, *Negotiation*, 142.

signs,” what is demonstrated is that “to fall in love is to individualize someone by the signs he bears or emits. It is to become sensitive to these signs, to undergo an apprenticeship to them.”

In his analysis of the Search, Deleuze reiterates that we can never predetermine how someone learns, which encounters will force thought to think, to become sensitive to a sign so as to develop, decipher and translate it, since it is “the contingency of the encounter that guarantees the necessity of what it leads us to think.” While we find here echoes of the violence of culture necessary for thinking that Deleuze develops in his engagement with Nietzsche, what is emphasized in Deleuze’s account of the sign in Proust is the contingency and involuntary nature of thinking. This is evident in the two fundamental themes Deleuze identifies in Proust in terms of “the accident of encounters and the pressure of constraints,” both of which oppose “the philosophical idea of ‘method.’” The sign forces us to think, calling on us to “interpret, decipher, explicate” it as we seek the truth. But in attempting this “explication,” we find that it is always “identified with the development of the sign in itself,” which is why “truth is always a truth of time.” In other words, we explicate and interpret the sign in time, as the sign develops itself in itself. It is in this way that the sign introduces a temporal aspect to thinking. Signs “cause problems” but it is in the development of the sign that problems force us to think, which is “the

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239 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 7.
240 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 97.
241 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 16.
242 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 17.
243 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 17.
only true creation,” since it requires, as part of the process of learning, “the genesis of the act of thinking within thought.”

Deleuze’s comparison between friendship and philosophy helps to deepen our understanding of the sign and the involuntary violence it works upon us when we are forced to think. Deleuze explains that in Proust, “thought appears in several guises: memory, desire, imagination…” But it is the specific guise of intelligence that friendship and philosophy share a connection. As Deleuze explains, it is intelligence which:

incites us to friendship, based on the community of ideas and sentiments. It invites us to philosophy, a voluntary and premeditated exercise of thought by which we may determine the order and content of objective significations…[Friendship] and philosophy are subject to the same criticism. According to Proust, friends are like well-disposed minds that are explicitly in agreement as to the signification of things, words, and ideas; but the philosopher too is a thinker who presupposes in himself the benevolence of thought, who attributes to thought the natural love of truth and to truth the explicit determination of what is naturally worked out by thought.

So long as friendship is based on a general “agreement as to the signification of things, words, and ideas,” and philosophy takes itself to be the friend of truth, then neither the friend nor the philosopher—here, they are likely one and the same—will be disturbed or unsettled by the truth to which intelligence incites them. This is so because the truth they find will always be a friend. Signs, on the other hand, are not friends. We do not encounter signs as “well-disposed minds.” In contrast to the docile, amiable truths that we find in friendship or that philosophy takes itself to be the friend of, the truth that “betrays itself” and “riots the soul” is only brought about

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244 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 97.
245 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 23.
246 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 30.
247 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 30.
through the encounter with signs, which “wrest [thought] from its natural stupor and its merely abstract possibilities.”

Thinking, in other words, is difficult. But the difficulty of thinking, according to Deleuze, is not a contingent feature of thought or “a de facto state of affairs,” but rather “a de jure structure of thought.” Thinking is not an inherent activity that is guaranteed by the structure of thought. Thinking is structurally difficult, which explains the necessity of provoking or shocking thought out of its “natural stupor.” In terms of friendship, we might say that thought is not a “well-disposed” friend to thinking. They are not “explicitly in agreement,” as if having a thought were equivalent to thinking. And yet, the two are frequently seen as equivalent or thought is, at the very least, presumed to be well-disposed to thinking. What causes thought to be lulled into assuming such a friendship with thinking? Method: “we are told, finally, that all we need to think well, to think truthfully, is a method.”

A Philosophical Taste of Coadaptation

Despite the exception given to Nietzsche’s method of dramatization, Deleuze and Guattari do not propose a method of constructivism for the three activities that constitute their account of philosophy. They instead posit a philosophical faculty of coadaptation, which they call a taste. We can begin to elucidate this philosophical faculty of coadaptation and why it is defined as a taste and not a method, by recalling the relationship between problems and solutions. As we’ve seen, problems are not “merely the shadow or epiphenomenon of [their]

248 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 97-98.

249 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 147.

250 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 97.

251 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 103.
solutions.” This is alluded to in Deleuze and Guattari’s claim that despite already having had the answer to the question, “what is philosophy?,” the question could only be asked with the arrival of old age, once the problem’s “occasions and circumstances, landscapes and personae, its conditions and unknowns” were determined. This relation between problems and solutions is paralleled in the relation among the three philosophical activities of constructivism and its counterpart of expressionism: “if the concept is a solution, the conditions of the philosophical problem are found on the plane of immanence presupposed by the concept (to what infinite movement does it refer in the image of thought?), and the unknowns of the problem are found in the conceptual personae that it calls up (what persona, exactly?).” Accordingly, “the criteria for each philosophical activity are found only in the other two”: (1) concepts are created as solutions to (2) problems that are determined according the conditions set up in laying out the plane of immanence and the presupposed image of thought, and (3) the unknowns that emerge through inventing conceptual personae. None of the three activities precedes the others since, “the whole of the problem (of which the solution is itself a part) always consists in constructing the other two when the third is underway.” It is for this reason that doing philosophy involves the coadaptation of “corresponding elements in the process of being determined,” and is, in this sense, marked by a philosophical taste and “problematic faculty.”

252 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 81.
253 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 2.
254 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 81.
255 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 81.
256 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 81.
257 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 133.
Why is this philosophical faculty *problematic*? For one, like the problem that is to be determined in its conditions and unknowns, the faculty of coadaptation is a faculty for that which is yet-to-be-determined, the “being-potential” of “the still-undetermined concept, of the persona still in limbo, and of the still-transparent plane.” The faculty, in this sense, is problematic insofar as it is like the problem that is yet to be determined. It is thus an unusual faculty, which Deleuze and Guattari describe as a “faculty of taste that is like an instinctive, almost animal *sapere*—a *Fiat or Fatum* that gives each philosopher the right of access to certain problems, like an imprint on his name or an affinity from which his works flow.”

Nietzsche is cited in reference to the notion of *sapere*, and his claim that “the Greek word designating ‘sage’ is etymologically related to *sapiio, I taste, sapiens, he who tastes, sisyphos, the man of keenest taste. A sharp savoring and selecting, a meaningful discriminating, in other words, makes out the peculiar art of the philosopher.” Nietzsche’s description of *sapere* is similar to the activity of filtering or selection in relation to the plane of immanence, which acts as a philosophical sieve filtering chaos. Rather than filtering or selecting, Deleuze and Guattari instead characterize this philosophical taste in terms of modulating, preferring this in order to emphasize the “limitless creation” for which the philosopher has a taste. Thus, Nietzsche’s use of “savoring” might more closely capture the nature of philosophical taste: the philosopher savors the “well-made” concept, leaving her with a taste for the undetermined.

Given this understanding of philosophical taste, we need to examine more closely the notion of coadaptation. Here again, it is the relation between problems and solutions that

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258 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 77.

259 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 79.

parallels the nature of coadaptation. Deleuze and Guattari explain, “problems and solutions are constructed about which we can say, ‘Failure…Success…,’ but only as we go along and on the basis of their coadaptations.” 261 The phrase, “as we go along” is rendered from the French expression au fur et à mesure, which could also be translated as “bit by bit,” “in the course of” or “as something progresses.” 262 Each part is constructed on its own but only bit by bit, responding to and emerging with the construction of the other elements. This process of coadaptation that is presented as defining the activity of philosophy unfolds similarly to how Deleuze describes the process of learning. Through being sensitive to the singularity of the problem, attending to the signs that constitute it, one learns through adjusting to—or coadapting with—the conditions and unknowns of the problem space. It is in this sense in which the philosophical taste of coadaptation can be understood as a process for learning how to create concepts, which proceeds bit by bit, like an apprenticeship to the signs of the problem space that one encounters in laying out the plane of immanence and the unknowns that are found in inventing the conceptual personae. The philosopher-as-apprentice might even ask certain questions as she navigates the problem space: where on the plane of immanence do the concepts “pave, occupy, or populate…bit by bit? 263 How does the plane of immanence “hold [the concepts] together”? 264 Who does it called up? When are the components saturated? 265 Where are the bridges thrown

261 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 82.

262 Deleuze and Guattari, Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?, 79.

263 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 36.

264 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 36.

265 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 90.
from one concept to another. If coadaptation is a philosophical taste that savors the well-formed concept, filtering the chaos and modulating the “limitless creation” through “corresponding elements in the process of being determined,” then it seems possible for the spatiotemporal questions asked by the philosopher-apprentice to generate methods like Nietzsche’s own method of dramatization.

**A New Image of Method**

Given this understanding of the philosophical taste of coadaptation and how it could generate methods that avoid Deleuze’s critique of method, we might wonder about the reasons for Deleuze’s fervent—yet apparently inconsistent—rejection of method. For one, Deleuze’s critique seems to presuppose a certain conception of method as something inherently passive, which offers us directions that can simply be followed, a route that will lead us to our destination, like a driver following GPS directions. But this is only one conception of method and, in particular, the conception of method found in the dogmatic image of thought. How does one account for this limited conception of method that Deleuze appears to accept, which motivates his critique and ostensible wholesale rejection of method?

One can speculate that Deleuze’s notion of method is significantly shaped by the Cartesian method, given both the vast influence of Descartes on the French philosophical tradition, in general, and the critiques of Descartes that dominated the French intellectual milieu of the 1960s. This period was a particularly prolific one for Deleuze, in which he wrote many of the texts raised in this section on method, including *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, *Proust and Signs*, and *Difference and Repetition*. It is difficult to exaggerate the extent to which Descartes

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266 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 90.
permeates the French ethos, with Cartesianism operating as a general frame of reference. In the forward to Jean-Luc Marion’s *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics*, Daniel Garber characterizes Descartes as a “French national icon,” describing his ubiquitous presence “from the intelligentsia to the working class,” such that one often sees “serious books about Descartes displayed in the windows of nonacademic bookstores and the Paris daily newspapers,” or hears “references to reason, clear and distinct ideas, and method…in conversation and in the popular press.”

In addition to Descartes’s pervading influence in French culture more generally, one must also take into account the particular role that Descartes played within French philosophy during the period of Deleuze’s early philosophical development. In a critical history of postwar France, Stefanos Geroulanos characterizes “the Descartes of the 1950s and 1960s” as “the set-piece villain” for French philosophers, arguing that “critical readings of Descartes were not incidental or local; together they delimit a systematic position of great significance for the structuralist generation.” Such a systematic critique is on display in *Difference in Repetition*, with Descartes’ fingerprints, so to speak, evident throughout the chapter on the dogmatic image of thought. In particular, Deleuze criticizes Descartes’s claim about method being easy, rebuking this notion of ease for poisoning “the whole of Cartesianism.”

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268 Stefanos Geroulanos, *Transparency in Postwar France: A Critical History of the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 282-283. Geroulanos contrasts the reception of Descartes during this period to the high approbation of him just a few years earlier. He illustrates this with the following anecdote: in the 120 year history of the World Congress of Philosophy, only once has an event been organized to commemorate a specific philosopher, and that was the 9th meeting, held in Paris in 1937, known as the “Congrès Descartes,” in celebration of the tricentennial of the *Discourse on Method* (285).

269 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 133.
emphasize the ease of method in rule four of *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, in which he defines method as, “reliable rules which are easy to apply, and such that if one follows them exactly, one will never take what is false to be true or fruitlessly expend one’s mental efforts, but will gradually and constantly increase one’s knowledge till one arrives at a true understanding of everything within one’s capacity.” Based on the exposition of the dogmatic image of thought presented above, Descartes’s definition of method should sound familiar, insofar as it encapsulates the image of thought that Deleuze seeks to uproot from philosophy.

While the general rejection of Cartesianism that dominated the French philosophical milieu during the second half of the 20th century might partly explain Deleuze’s critique of method, questions still remain. Why reject method itself, instead of rejecting the Cartesianism that has shackled method, restricting it to the dominant conception that is complicit in the dogmatic image of thought? Why not liberate method from the Cartesian method, just as Deleuze sought to liberate thought from the dogmatic image? Perhaps the associations with the Cartesian method were deemed too profound to overcome by Deleuze. Or perhaps Deleuze could not himself distinguish a notion of method independent of the Cartesian method. Deleuze’s praise for Nietzsche’s method of dramatization, however, speaks against this latter explanation. Maybe method was the proverbial baby that Deleuze threw out with the ‘Cartesian bathwater.’ This explanation is more plausible if one were to accept Alain Badiou’s—possibly hyperbolic—characterization of Deleuze as remaining “implacably hostile” to Descartes.271

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While one can really only speculate on this matter, it is important to also recall Deleuze’s earlier advice to not “clean and scrape bones like the critic and historian,” but to “awaken a dormant concept and to play it again on a new stage, even if this comes at the price of turning it against itself.”

We can therefore propose a new task for philosophy of awakening the dormant concept of method, turning the Cartesian method against itself and putting Deleuze’s critique of method on a new stage. This task might lead us to a new image of method, one that can account for the contingency and forces of culture so as to avoid, like Nietzsche’s method of dramatization, the critique of method within the dogmatic image of thought. Moreover, just as philosophy has the creation of concepts as its own exclusive domain, distinct from the domain of the sciences, why should it not also have its own conception of method that is distinct from the scientific conception of method? Can method avoid making a premeditated decision to think? Could there be such a thing as an involuntary method? Are there methods that cultivate one’s sensitivity to signs, preserving the element of contingency necessary for constituting problems that are generative of concept creation? In seeking to determine a new image of method, we can take as guidance from Deleuze’s critique the need to break away from the metaphysical question, “what is?,” and attend to the spatiotemporal questions that ground method in a place and time, driving the philosophical practice of concept creation.

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272 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 83.
Chapter 2

Methodological Reflexivity and Philosophical Questioning

*To think, really to think, is to engage the frightening evidence of our own conceptual limitations and to realize in such limits, the magnitude of all that transcends us.*

—Lewis Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence*

*The art of questioning is the art of questioning ever further, i.e., the art of thinking.*

—Gadamer, *Truth and Method*

**Introduction: The Problem of Method**

When we reflect on the concept of method, we tend to examine it in terms of its relation to a particular domain. There are, for instance, practical methods that offer guidance in the performance of a task or instruction for effectively producing a desired result. Pedagogical methods, for example, present various teaching strategies and approaches for facilitating learning. There is also the scientific method—or arguably methods—which consists of processes and modes of investigation for constructing and testing hypotheses toward the generation of empirical knowledge within the sciences. In such instances, the proper method, or at least the general methodological approach, seems to follow in a relatively straightforward way from the delimited aims and boundaries of the domain.

In contrast, identifying the proper method(s) of philosophy, understood in its broadest sense as a domain of inquiry, poses a unique problem. There are, on the one hand, many different philosophical methods of inquiry—e.g., conceptual analysis, dialectic, phenomenological, etc.—which generally lack a common unifying aim akin to the production of empirical knowledge that links scientific methods. On the other hand, there are many cases in which philosophical methods
are employed in fields outside of philosophy or in non-philosophical ways. One might consider, as an example of the latter, the Bolshevik’s use of Marx’s dialectical materialism, in which a philosophical method was employed not for the purpose of developing and contributing to theoretical work in historical materialism but for other, non-academic ends. There are also numerous examples, particularly in the social sciences, of philosophical methods employed in disciplines outside of philosophy.¹

Beyond these particular challenges of identifying the proper methods of philosophy, there is a more complex and intractable problem, which arises from philosophy’s specific orientation to the domain of inquiry, according to which it attends to the conditions of inquiry. The problem, in other words, concerns philosophy conducting a philosophical inquiry of method itself and, consequently, its own relation to methods. Such an inquiry involves, in part, attempting to articulate an account of method, what it is and how it relates to the activity of thinking. In doing so, there emerges a familiar, yet—in this particular context—especially challenging question of justification: how to justify a preference for one conception of method over another? Beyond the traditional issues of justification, predominantly associated with debates in analytic epistemology, the unique challenge that this question generates is not about justifying one particular methodological approach over another. Rather, it concerns justifying any conception of method itself. Such a meta-methodological analysis entails a fundamental problem: responding to the question about the nature of method so as to arrive at a conception of method will itself involve adopting, either implicitly or explicitly, a certain methodological approach. In other words, I cannot think about method—i.e., take it up as an object of thought—without

presupposing a particular methodology that orients my thinking. *Method cannot be thought independently of method.*

The problem of having to use method in order to raise questions about method is further complicated when we attend to method’s relation to the activity of thinking. The reflexivity of thinking, that the activity of thinking can take itself up, ask itself what or how it is—a question that is already part of the very activity it problematizes—not only parallels the meta-methodological case. It also highlights the fundamentally dynamic and open character of the activity of thinking. By taking this into consideration when reflecting on the relation between method and thinking, we can reformulate the particular challenge that arises for philosophy as follows: how does philosophy, as a domain of inquiry concerned with, among other things, the conditions of inquiry, relate to method in a way that maintains the open and dynamic nature of thinking? Moreover, if methods tend toward a kind of closure in which thinking becomes rigid and static, threatening the open and dynamic nature of the activity of thinking, how does philosophy relate to method so as to resist such closure?

**Two Conceptions of Method**

What does it mean to speak of method in the abstract? One can begin from the basic presumption that there exists some relationship between method and thought such that a method orients the activity of thinking in a certain way. Derived from the Greek *meta*, meaning “in pursuit or quest of,” and *hodos*, as “a way or manner,” the etymological meaning of “method” suggests a purpose or end toward which thought aims in being oriented or guided in a particular
way or manner by a method. In other words, you pursue this object in this way and you seek that object in that manner.

There is, however, a potential problem with this abstract approach to the question of method. Attempting to grasp the nature of method—or at least the way in which it orients thinking—indeed of the context in which it operates, runs the risk of biasing our conception of it. In particular, an analysis of method that takes abstraction as its starting point will be predisposed toward a conception of method that centers formal abstraction. This is, indeed, the conventional understanding of method, which I refer to as the procedural conception, according to which method is defined as a formal structure that exists independent of its content and therefore does not vary relative to the objects of study to which it is applied. Nicholas Rescher’s account exemplifies this formal, procedural conception of method, in which he explains philosophy’s methodological principle as “a rule of procedure that specifies a modus operandi…framed in terms of maxims that prescribe the appropriateness or inappropriateness of different ways of proceeding in philosophizing.”

This understanding of method as a rule of procedure is evident in John Rawls’s theory of justice, according to which the formal procedure of the original position generates the principles of justice, the fairness of which is guaranteed by the procedure. The abstraction required by the original position, behind the veil of ignorance, illustrates the logic of the procedural conception of method: to avoid biasing the outcome of one’s investigation by presupposing this or that

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substantive claim or premise, one can instead proceed according to a method’s rules of procedure so as to establish substantive claims. In this way, method-as-procedure takes its formal abstraction to be a safeguard against accusations of question-begging or bias. According to this logic, if the outcome of one’s investigation has been presupposed from the outset, then the source of the error is not the method itself but a failure on the investigator’s part to fully abstract all content from the purely formal rules of procedure.

The distinct boundary that is drawn between method and content on the procedural conception can be further reinforced by accounts that differentiate between method and methodology. For example, Wendy Olsen and Jamie Morgan define method, “as a tool or technique…that can be distinguished from its particular use and application and from our further understanding of what we are doing when we do so.”5 They contrast this against their definition of methodology, “as a combination of techniques, the practices we conform to when we apply them, and our interpretation of what we are doing when we do so.”6 Such a distinction ultimately further insulates the purely formal abstraction of method, effectively isolating the “closure and regularity in method” from the indeterminacy of the interpretive practices in which it is used.7 Accordingly, the formal abstraction of the procedural conception of method applies not only to the particular content within an examined domain, but also to the activity of thinking and the context in which it is oriented by a method. Putting aside for the moment questions about whether it is possible to achieve such formal abstraction, questions about its desirability arise

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when we briefly reflect on some of the implications of the relation between method and thinking entailed by the procedural conception. Vojtech Filkorn’s distinction between strong and weak methods helps to illustrate some of these implications in terms of the consequences that he sees as resulting from the current tendency toward strong methods within the sciences. According to Filkorn, strong (and semi-strong) methods are “methodologically closed,” insofar as “the structure of the initial point determines the structure of the way…everything is potentially given, predictable or calculable (deducible) already at the beginning.” A strong method perhaps exemplifies the ideal of formal abstraction, an axiomatic system that is whole unto itself, each step of the procedure deduced from a starting point. Filkorn relates various periods in the history of science that emphasized the ideal of a closed system constructed only by strong and semi-strong methods, with what he sees as the “more vigorous tendencies” in contemporary science “to change as many methods as possible into strong methods which would work in computers and thus replace to an increasing extent man’s intellectual activity.” If we understand the procedural conception of method as taking strong methods as its ideal, then method is not simply a formal procedure that orients thinking toward an object of study. Method, as formal abstraction, ultimately seeks to neutralize the indeterminacy of the activity of thinking, replacing the thinker with the algorithm, the meaning of thoughts with the coding of programming languages.

8 Vojtech Filkorn, “Strong and Weak Methods,” in Studies in Logic and the Foundations of Mathematics: Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science VIII 126, eds. Jens Fendstad, Ivan Frolov and Risto Hilpinen (Holland: Elsevier, 1989): 325-326. While Filkorn’s use of the notion of methodological closure differs from the way in which I employ the term later on, the two are not entirely unrelated. Filkorn uses methodological closure to describe a specific type of method, which differs from my use of it to describe what might be considered an approach to method or even an assumption about how method relates to thinking. One way in which these two notions of methodological closure seem to overlap is according to the idea that strong methods are more likely to predispose those who use them toward the kind of methodological closure that I describe.

While some might not find the obsolescence of thinking—and, consequently, the thinker—disconcerting or even undesirable, for many who take themselves to be engaged in philosophical inquiry, it is likely to strike an “existential” nerve, so to speak. We can, however, understand this particular threat posed by the procedural conception of method less as an impending and inexorable danger that looms ever closer and more as an always present feature that emerges from a desire to stabilize and fix the indeterminate and undefined, to establish that which is known with a certainty that removes it from the domain of the questionable.

While the procedural conception of method might be well-suited for the sciences, with their predetermined domain of inquiry delimited to empirical objects of study that are examined according to the ideal of a disinterested and objective investigator, there are reasons to believe this might not be the case for philosophy. Unlike the sciences, philosophy does not have a predetermined domain of inquiry and its objects of study are not delimited in advance. One could argue that philosophy’s objects of study do not preexist examination but are, instead, constituted by it. Moreover, while the notion of the philosopher as disinterested has had various proponents throughout the history of philosophy—perhaps most prominently advocated by Kant—numerous critiques have been raised against such an ideal, particularly in feminist philosophy, philosophy of race, and decolonial theory. Such traditions, in different ways, have rejected the idea of the disinterested philosopher, arguing that it often functions to conceal the dominant conception of the philosopher as white, European and male. Accordingly, such critiques and conceptions of

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10 See: Michel Foucault, “What is Critique?” in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 56. In this text, Foucault describes his own historical-philosophical practice as requiring one to “make one’s own history, fabricate history,” rejecting the idea that the historical objects upon which philosophy reflects are “ready-made facts” (Foucault, “What is Critique?” 56). This aligns with Deleuze and Guattari’s description of philosophy as, “the art of forming, inventing and fabricating concepts.” *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 2.

philosophy offer at least an initial sense that the procedural conception of method likely fails to properly accommodate the particular nature of philosophy as a domain of inquiry distinct from the sciences.

There is, however, an alternative conception of method. In contrast to the conventional, unidirectional relation of a procedure operating on its content, method can instead be conceived as existing in a more dynamic, constitutive relationship with its content. This *relational conception* of method, as I refer to it, emphasizes both the way in which a method is dependent on its objects of study—i.e., its content—as well as how the objects of study are *made* coherent by the method. The implications that the particular nature of this dependency has on the relation between method and thinking will significantly differ from the role of thinking in the procedural conception.

There are a few different ways to understand the nature of a method’s relational dependency on its objects of study. There is a mundane sense in which a method might depend on its content in terms of different methods being considered more or less appropriate or suited to the specific contextual demands of a particular inquiry. In their account of “method mismatch” and “method bias,” Adrian Currie and Shahar Avin highlight various challenges of such methodological pluralism in the sciences. The initial premise from which their analysis proceeds expresses this mundane sense of methodological dependency, accepting as uncontroversial, “that good knowledge-production admits of a plurality of methods, and that these are more or less
appropriate in different epistemic situations.”\textsuperscript{12} While such an account of dependency does introduce an element of relationality, it nonetheless maintains, or at least fails to challenge, the view of method as essentially static and fixed. It is this static understanding of method that the relational conception challenges by appealing to a more formative notion of methodological dependency, one which goes beyond dependency as merely apposite to the specific epistemic situation of the content.

The formative dependency of the relational conception is grounded in a deeper, more intimately entwined relationship between methods and their objects of study. Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s account of the mutually constitutive relation between method and content illustrates the nature of this formative dependency. In the context of exploring alternatives to the “Eurocentrism, scientificism, and economicism, [which have been] central to the self-definition of the [modern] university,”\textsuperscript{13} Maldonado-Torres demonstrates how both interdisciplinary fields, like religious studies, and unidisciplinary fields, such as sociology, economics, or political science, all “presuppose the existence of a coherent object of study—society, the economy, or politics—that gives credence to its particular methods.”\textsuperscript{14} He continues by describing the constitutive relation between methods and objects of study, asserting that:

This is more or less a circular process insofar as the methods themselves are the ones that allow one to find or delimit the object of study. Ultimately, it is difficult to establish whether the object of study provides legitimacy to the field, or if it is the method that both gives credence to the field and to the presumed object of study. In short, method and object of study constitute themselves mutually.”\textsuperscript{15}


\textsuperscript{13} Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Thinking at the Limits of Philosophy and Doing Philosophy Elsewhere,” in Reframing the Practice of Philosophy, 268.

\textsuperscript{14} Maldonado-Torres, “Thinking at the Limits of Philosophy and Doing Philosophy Elsewhere,” 264.

\textsuperscript{15} Maldonado-Torres, “Thinking at the Limits of Philosophy and Doing Philosophy Elsewhere,” 264.
While the critique of academic institutions leads Maldonado-Torres to frame this “circular process” in terms of disciplinary legitimacy, the mutually constitutive relation that he presents need not be isolated to such institutional concerns. In his search for decolonial approaches to thinking and praxis within the academy, Maldonado-Torres ultimately draws attention to the capacity for questions to break out of this “circular process.” Without minimizing the importance of questioning—an issue I turn to in later sections of this analysis—the relational conception of method should be seen as already asking questions. At least initially, however, these questions are not for the purpose of breaking out of the mutually constitutive relation. Instead, the mutually constitutive relation itself calls into question the static notion of method. In doing so, it signals a potential opening for a decolonial approach, or at least makes way for one, by undermining the more pernicious idea of method as a merely passive, neutral means for uncovering or revealing pre-existing coherent objects. Accordingly, the legitimacy that a method gives to the presupposed existence of a coherent object of study is called into question by the relational conception insofar as it accounts for the implications of what it means for methods to be constituted through and by actively cohering their objects of study.

In order to recognize such implications, it is important to take seriously the depth of the reflexive, mutually constituting dynamic between method and object. For the relational conception of method, coherent objects of study do not preexist the method, just as the method does not preexist its objects of study. They are mutually constituted by and through their relation. One could assume, however, that this mutual emergence of method and objects of study is the end of the story, as if once constituted through cohering its objects of study, a method can be

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fixed and made stable, thereby returning us to a procedural conception of method after a “regrettably” unstable emergence. The reflexive dynamism of the relational conception of method, however, should not be understood as pertaining solely to the constitution of a method. The objects of study continue to formatively shape a method, just as the method continues to cohere and formatively shape its objects. Yet, to fully appreciate what drives this process of continuous formative negotiation between methods and their objects—as well as how it constitutes the larger domain or discipline in which a method is legible—it is necessary to include how the activity of thinking features into the mutually constituting dynamic of the relational conception of method.

Like the dynamic process that exists between a method and its object of study, the activity of thinking that is oriented by a method also includes a constant negotiation. These are, in fact, interrelated processes since, on the one hand, the object of study toward which methods orient thinking is not itself a static, complete object. Nor, on the other hand, is its meaning fixed by the way in which it is thought. Consequently, how my thinking is oriented by a method is never a finished project. The method, the activity of thinking that it orients, and the object toward which thinking is oriented, are all in a constant conversation in which each refuses the completion of the other.

We can illustrate this reflexive dynamic of the relational conception of method through what Lewis Gordon refers to as the methodological “paradox at the heart of human studies.”17 Grounded in Fanon’s critique of method, Gordon explains how the paradox arises from the “constituting-constituted relationship” between the thinker of thoughts, the meaning of thoughts,

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and the intersubjectively constituted social world that is the condition for the possibility of both. In the context of human studies, the paradox is evident in the methodological implications of an investigator of human reality who is “constituting human phenomena while and through studying them.”\(^{18}\) How does one study a phenomenon that is constituted by the very act of being studied? For the meta-reflective social theorist who takes on the task of “making thinking a living activity,” the salient consequence of the paradox is the need to methodologically engage with the inherent indeterminacy of all living things.\(^{19}\) As Gordon explains, “the subjects of human study are fundamentally incomplete, which means that what emerges from a sustained investigation of them is their resistance to epistemological closure.”\(^{20}\) The relational conception of method takes this paradox one step further. If methods are constituted while and through constituting their objects of study as coherent, then the challenge for the “meta-reflective” thinker becomes one of resisting methodological closure, according to which the coherence of the objects of study is mistaken as a \textit{fait accompli}. I revisit Gordon’s paradox in greater detail in the section on methodological closure, focusing on how philosophy can integrate the relational conception of method in a way that exemplifies the imminent reflexivity of philosophical thinking.

**Meta-Methodological Circularity**

Given these two conceptions of method, the procedural and the relational, we now arrive at the meta-methodological challenge, noted above, of justifying the preference for one conception of method over the other. If method cannot be thought independently of method, then any justification of a conception of method must presuppose itself and its own norms of

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\(^{18}\) Gordon, \textit{Disciplinary Decadence}, 125.


\(^{20}\) Gordon, \textit{Disciplinary Decadence}, 125.
justification, thereby generating an inherent circularity that could pose significant problems for any meta-methodological analysis to get off the ground. One way to respond to this challenge is to see how this circularity plays out with respect to the two conceptions of method, so as to determine the nature of the circularity of their meta-methodological analyses.

With regards to the procedural conception, it would initially seem as though it could perform its own meta-methodological analysis without presupposing itself. Insofar as method is conceived as a purely formal rule of procedure that doesn’t presuppose its objects but operates independently of any particular content to which it can be applied, the meta-methodological analysis would ostensibly operate similarly: a procedure of self-analysis. The problem that quickly emerges, however, is that a procedure of self-analysis must presuppose its objects, since, in this case, it is its own object. The meta-methodological procedure of self-analysis generates its own internal contradiction: in order to maintain a purely formal, abstract analysis, the procedural conception of method cannot take itself as the content of its own meta-methodological justification. In other words, the procedure cannot run itself through itself without undermining its own formal principles of justification. The rigid boundary between method and content, which was originally presented as an advantage that insulated procedural approaches against bias, is ultimately its weakness, insofar as it leads to its own viciously circular meta-methodological analysis.

The circularity of the relational conception of method, on the other hand, can take itself as the object of its own meta-methodological analysis without generating such internal contradiction. Unlike the procedural conception, the boundary between method and content is simply the result of their mutually constitutive relation. The boundary that separates method and content really only exists on account of their relation, emerging through the active ongoing
process of relating: boundary-as-relating. As a result, such a boundary is inherently responsive to the indeterminacy of each element in the relation, thereby resisting the overdetermining rigidity that characterizes the boundary between method and content on the procedural conception. This boundary-as-relating elucidates the notion that method cannot be understood or evaluated independent of its object of study, and vice versa. This relation is analogous, in certain ways, to coevolutionary biological relations in which two organisms that have evolved through the effects of their reciprocal relation cannot be understood without their relation being taken into consideration.

What are the implications of this boundary-as-relating for the relational conception’s meta-methodological analysis, beyond the fact that it doesn’t generate an internal contradiction? For one, the relational conception of method not only can take itself as the object of its own self-relating analysis, but, in some sense, it must or at least ought to. Similar to the task of the meta-reflective social theorist that Gordon describes, taking a meta-methodological stance towards its own self-reflexive relation would seem to be a task internal to the relational conception of method. Accordingly, a relational meta-methodological analysis appears to be less viciously circular and more like a hermeneutic circularity in which “the meaning of the part can be discovered only from the context—i.e., ultimately from the whole,” and yet “the whole, in terms of which the part is to be understood, is not given before the part.”

Understanding, according to Gadamer, “is always a movement of this kind of circle, which is why the repeated return from the whole to the parts and vice versa is essential. Moreover, this circle is constantly expanding, since the concept of the whole is relative, and being integrated in ever larger contexts always

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affects the understanding of the individual part.” The metaphor of a “constantly expanding” circle helps to illustrate the reflexive circularity of the relational meta-methodological analysis, which is less like the turning blades of a fan and more like the dynamic, swirling gyres of a whirlpool.

Given that the above examination of the procedural and relational meta-methodological analyses pertains only to the circularities that result from the relationship between method and content—even though, in this case, the content is the conception of method itself—it is important to also examine the effects that these different circularities have on the relationship between method and thinking. In other words, how might the nature of the meta-methodological circularity influence the way in which thinking is oriented by these different conceptions of method?

It will be useful to begin with the hermeneutic circularity of the relational conception of method, which can be understood as entailing a constant movement of readjustment: a method that is reflexively engaged with its content, continually responding to changes in the object, will likewise continue to orient and reorient thinking. The kind of responsive movement of the relational conception resembles what Anna Leander calls “methods in the making,” in which one takes a more “informed, imaginative, open and evolving” approach to method. Leander contrasts this to the more conventional “narrow and restrictive approaches to method,” illustrating both through an analogy, in which she argues: “it is of essence to abandon an approach that sees methods as recipes to be followed—a cookbook approach—and instead adopt

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an approach…as having more in common with an online interactive encyclopedia, such as Wikipedia…It has no fixed table of contents or structure…[and] is constantly evolving and built through researchers’ intuitions, experience, and entries.”

Following a recipe on the cookbook approach would be analogous to following a rule of procedure on the procedural conception, which will orient thinking in its own particular way, as we will see shortly. However, Leander’s method-as-Wikipedia analogy offers a useful conceptual image from which we can begin to draw some provisional ideas about the effects of the relational circularity on the activity of thinking.

First, one of the more obvious implications is that such an approach to method is more demanding on thinking, requiring the thinker to creatively contribute to the method, much like contributing to a Wikipedia article, using their background knowledge and experience about the object of study to inform the “constant tweaking and transforming of the methods.”

Beyond the effort involved on the part of the thinker, the open and evolving character of the “methods in the making” approach also calls for a certain critical perspective similar to the stance one takes—or perhaps ought to take—to Wikipedia. As an open, collaboratively written online encyclopedia with a vast and ever-growing collection of articles to which anyone can contribute, Wikipedia is undoubtedly a valuable resource. Yet, its continually changing, relatively unrestricted openness also makes it an unreliable resource that should not be used uncritically. To be clear, the unreliability of Wikipedia is not solely on account of its lack of a peer-review process, according to which anyone with access to the Internet can edit and contribute. Its unreliability can also be understood as a consequence of Wikipedia’s temporality, with additions and changes to articles

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24 Leander, “From cookbooks to encyclopaedias in the making,” 233.

25 Leander, “From cookbooks to encyclopaedias in the making,” 237.
made constantly. While this temporal element of the “methods in the making” approach will not change and evolve as rapidly as Wikipedia, it nonetheless offers an analogous demand in terms of the critical stance one takes toward not only the use of a particular method for thinking about an object of study, but also a method’s more general role in defining a domain of inquiry.

If the way in which a method orients thinking is never settled, such that thinking must always be open to being reoriented, then the methodological commitments of a domain of inquiry like philosophy become less tenable. The philosopher must be willing to call into question her methodological commitments, given that the method to which she’s committed is, in a sense, a moving and evolving target. Moreover, the mutually constituting changes in the relation between method and content—which generates the ever-expanding hermeneutic circularity of the relational conception—will produce changes in how the objects of study are made coherent and, therefore, how they are thought. But how the objects of study are thought must remain open to the possibility of revision. One might wonder, however, what it is that brings about the need for such revisions, as well as whether remaining open to their possibility also entails an acceptance of the changes? Such questions and the issue of methodological commitments will be returned to and further developed in the subsequent sections as part of evaluating their implications for an account of philosophy’s relation to method.

In contrast to the hermeneutic circularity of the relational conception, the vicious circularity of the procedural conception is less likely to facilitate such critical reflexivity. It seems reasonable to infer that a conception of method that is unable to question itself will orient thinking likewise: thought that is unable or at least unmotivated to question and attend to itself. The vicious circularity of the procedural conception of method elucidates the way in which its rigid boundary between method and content precipitates into a kind of passive relation between
thinking and method. The lack of reflexivity that generates the procedural conception’s vicious circularity can be seen as mirroring or possibly inducing a similar lack of reflexivity in the activity of thinking, whereby thinking fails to attend to itself and question the way in which it is oriented. As a result, the procedural conception of method could be understood as encouraging or even sanctioning thought’s own passivity. Like following a recipe, thinking can simply follow the procedure, letting the method do the work of thinking. When this habitual passivity of thinking is paired with a rigid and unquestioned commitment to a particular method, the result is a form of methodological closure in which one assumes that method is all that is needed for thinking.

One might question the emphasis that I’ve placed on reflexivity in accounting for the effects of the circularity of the two conceptions of method. Why is the procedural conception’s inability to reflexively engage in its own meta-methodological analysis necessarily a weakness? In order to respond, it might be useful to recall how, in responding to the question of method, it quickly became apparent that the way in which the question was approached significantly shaped the response. This kind of performative difficulty doesn’t pertain solely to the meta-methodological. It is, rather, an ever-present challenge for any ‘meta’ investigation that understands its position not as above or external to a domain but as immanent. Such a position doesn’t merely stipulate reflexivity, as if it were an additional feature or condition of the investigation. The position itself is inextricably reflexive. Accordingly, the emphasis I place on methodological reflexivity, as well as my motivation for carefully attending to the continually emerging perplexities of my own meta-philosophical account of method, does not primarily derive from a commitment to performative consistency. Beyond such a commitment being motivationally akin to the relatively weak, external stipulation for reflexivity, the demand for
consistency can also presuppose a totalizing notion of consistency when it demands complete consistency, consistency that is self-consistent or what Gordon calls “hyperconsistency.”26 Performative consistency as the primary motivation for reflexivity would preconfigure the investigation towards only those objects that are themselves internally consistent, arriving at conclusions that further legitimize the “indisputable goodness” of consistency itself.

With performative consistency relegated to a more subsidiary role, the primary motivation for attending to the reflexivity of this particular ‘meta’ investigation, as well as the emphasis placed on it in evaluating the two conceptions of method, is generated internally: such attention functions as something akin to a praxis for thinking, insofar as reflexivity creates the conditions for thought to resist totalizing itself. Immanent reflexivity, in this sense, operates like a meta-method that guides the evaluation of method while simultaneously performing the demands of the relational conception. It also, ultimately, confirms that method cannot be thought independently of method, while nonetheless offering a critical, immanent position that makes it possible to think about method without submitting to its closure.

**Methodological Closure**

Given these two conceptions of method, their respective meta-methodological circularities, and the resultant effects of each on the activity of thinking, I return now to the initial challenge posed for philosophy: if methods have the potential to threaten the open and dynamic nature of thinking by tending toward a kind of closure in which the activity of thinking ceases to actively work on itself, how does philosophy relate to method and its own practice so as to resist such closure? In order to respond to this challenge, it is important to first clarify the

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nature of this closure. The notion of methodological closure, briefly mentioned in the previous section, was described as the assumption that method is all that is needed for thinking. This understanding of methodological closure differs slightly from Filkorn’s use of the term in characterizing strong methods. For Filkorn, a method is closed insofar as “the structure of the initial point determines the structure of the way,” which leads him to define closure in terms of the predictability of what follows from the initial point such that all is given or deducible from the beginning.\(^{27}\) Methodological closure, in this sense, is a feature of the method itself or perhaps of the relation between method and its content. Through taking the relational conception of method into consideration, the notion of methodological closure I seek to examine is broader than just being a feature of any particular method. It also characterizes the relation between method and thinking, identifying the distinctive way that method can be taken up as something complete and stable such that its formative relation with its content and the thought it orients is cut off. Methodological closure, in other words, describes how thinking relates to method as a totality.

One might suppose that philosophy can resist methodological closure by simply negating method and thinking a-methodologically. The problem with this response, however, is that it ultimately fails to resist the closure of methodological closure, which is not just a feature of method itself, but of how thinking relates to a methodological framework such that it forecloses the possibility of thinking otherwise. It is a closure that fixes the orientation of thinking toward not only what it expects to think, but also how it will be thought. For philosophy to resist methodological closure, it must negate the ossifying tendencies of totalizing modes of thinking, which seek to eliminate the indeterminacy of thought, much like strong methods. Philosophy,

\(^{27}\) Filkorn, “Strong and Weak Methods,” 325-326.
thus, cannot negate method and embrace an a-methodological orientation in order to resist methodological closure since total negation is itself totalizing. The challenge for philosophy, therefore, is to reimagine its relationship with method so as to resist methodological closure by negating the totalizing mode of philosophical thought that constitutes its closure. The central question, in other words, is how philosophy should relate to method when taking into consideration both the totalizing nature of methodological closure, as well as the fundamentally reflexive nature of philosophical thinking.

**Methodological Closure as Totalizing Thinking**

If we consider methodological closure in terms of the relation between method and thinking, in which thinking becomes totalized through the assumption that a static and fixed method is all one needs to think, the notion of totalizing thinking requires further elucidation. In a simple sense, thinking becomes totalizing when it assumes an all-encompassing scope from which nothing comprehensible could, in principle, escape its comprehension. Such modes of thinking can therefore be characterized by their failure to question the scope of their comprehension. Whatever falls outside this comprehension, that which is anomalous or unexpected is either invisible to totalizing thought or it is made comprehensible so as to be brought into alignment. Totalizing thought thus tries to possess and contain everything it encounters so as to maintain the exhaustiveness of its scope. It is thinking that seeks completeness in terms of bringing all that is thinkable into the category of the thought. This notion of “the thinkable” calls attention to an implicit ontological view that underlies the totalizing thinking of methodological closure: there is, on the one hand, the thought—or that which thinking has already brought into the domain of comprehension—and, on the other, the unthought—or that which thinking has yet to grasp and comprehend. Like a conqueror seeking to
both expand his dominion while consolidating his power within the already conquered territory, totalizing thinking must continually tame and master the unthought so as to legitimize its supremacy over “the realm of thought.”

There is, however, a fundamentally mistaken assumption on which this ontological view of the thinkable is grounded, an assumption that, to a certain extent, drives this quest for the totalization of the thinkable. Totalizing thought’s claim to exhaustive comprehension can only be legitimized insofar as the unthought is assumed to be finite and, as a result, shrinking in an inverse relation to the expansion of comprehension. Yet the unthought is not like a finite resource, diminishing as it is comprehended by thought, as if “consumed” by the activity of thinking. We can understand the fundamental flaw of this view by recalling the paradox that arises from the constituting-constituted relationship. Thinking is not an activity that takes place in an abstract void but is, rather, a living activity that takes place in an intersubjectively constituted social world, which is itself the condition for the possibility of the thinker of thoughts and their meaning. Yet even though the social world constitutes the thinker and the meaning of thoughts, the social world itself emerges from intersubjective processes, which are themselves partly constituted by the meaning-making activities of thinkers. This dynamic, intimate interrelation between thought and the social world generates the inherent indeterminacy of the thinkable, which thwarts the possibility of its totalization.

In order to maintain this flawed ontological view of “the realm of thought,” totalizing modes of thinking suppress thought’s indeterminacy, delinking it from the social world. This can result in a kind of self-fulfilling delusion that sustains totalizing thought’s claim to exhaustive comprehension. Gordon’s account of disciplinary decadence in terms of “the declining significance of evidence,” describes one way in which totalizing thinking dismisses
countervailing evidence from the social world, either making invisible that which falls outside its comprehension or contorting it in order to make it conform.\textsuperscript{28} The absence of external resistance can then be interpreted as confirming the exhaustive scope of totalizing thought. Before turning to develop this comparison between totalizing thinking and Gordon’s notion of disciplinary decadence, it will be useful to first consider an example of totalizing thinking that illustrates some of the ways in which it can manifest.

Francis Fukuyama’s defense of Western liberal democracy offers an example of how thought’s indeterminacy is suppressed through the contortions that enable totalizing thought to maintain its claim to exhaustive comprehension. In \textit{The End of History and the Last Man}, Fukuyama uses the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of Western liberal democracy to support his conclusion that it is difficult to “[imagine] a world that is radically better than our own, or a future that is not essentially democratic and capitalist.”\textsuperscript{29} While Fukuyama acknowledges the existence of poverty, homelessness, and inequalities in terms of “opportunity for minorities and women,” such evidence against the superiority of Western liberal capitalist democracy is framed as just some of the “many things that could be improved,” including among them “competitiveness” and job creation.\textsuperscript{30} The countervailing evidence is thus contorted to conform to the framework defended by Fukuyama. Instead of considering the possibility that inequality might be a product or necessary feature of the dominant political and economic system, Fukuyama presents it as the type of problem perfectly suited for resolution by the

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\textsuperscript{28} Gordon, \textit{Disciplinary Decadence}, 30.

\textsuperscript{29} Francis Fukuyama, \textit{The End of History and the Last Man} (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 46.

\textsuperscript{30} Fukuyama, \textit{The End of History and the Last Man}, 46.
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dominant system. By reframing it in a manner that supports his conclusion, the significance of evidence that might challenge the superiority of the framework he defends is diminished.

In addition to such reframing contortions, Fukuyama’s use of his own inability to imagine otherwise—to imagine “a future that is not essentially democratic and capitalist”—exemplifies the way in which totalizing thought suppresses its own indeterminacy so as to justify its claim to exhaustive comprehension.\footnote{Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man, 46.} In a reiteration of this unimaginability, Fukuyama makes explicit this underlying function, stating: “we cannot picture to ourselves a world that is \textit{essentially} different from the present one, and at the same time better. Other, less reflective ages also thought of themselves as the best, but we arrive at this conclusion exhausted, as it were, from the pursuit of alternatives we felt \textit{had} to be better than liberal democracy.”\footnote{Fukuyama, The End of History, 46.} Fukuyama justifies his conclusion concerning the supremacy of the present by suppressing the indeterminacy of the past and future: pointing to the “conquered land” of past alternatives and the “invisibility” of future possibilities as evidence of the conclusion’s exhaustive comprehension. In this way, totalizing thinking sustains itself by representing what \textit{is} as the apex of comprehension, thereby promoting the dominion of a static and oppressively \textit{transparent} present.

Philosophy itself offers numerous examples of totalizing modes of thinking. One could, for instance, point to critiques that have been leveled against the history of totalizing thought in

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\footnote{Fukuyama, The End of History, 46.} The difficulty of maintaining this exhaustive stance, in the face of mounting evidence against it, is apparent in a 2018 interview in which Fukuyama partially amends his critique of Marxism while still seemingly defending his conclusions about liberal democracy. In response to a question about the resurgence of the socialist left in the US and UK, Fukuyama reflects: “It all depends on what you mean by socialism. Ownership of the means of production…I don’t think that’s going to work. If you mean redistributive programmes that try to redress this big imbalance in both incomes and wealth that has emerged then, yes, I think not only can it come back, it ought to come back…At this juncture, it seems to me that certain things Karl Marx said are turning out to be true. He talked about the crisis of overproduction…that workers would be impoverished and there would be insufficient demand.” (Fukuyama, “Socialism Ought to Come Back,” interview by George Eaton, New Statesman America (October 17, 2018), https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/observations/2018/10/francis-fukuyama-interview-socialism-ought-come-back).
Western philosophy, which trace the effects of its methodological commitments to various atrocities: ontology’s totalizing grasp of Being as leading to the “totalitarian tyranny” of the 20th century (Levinas);\footnote{Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism}, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 186. Levinas associates the tradition of Western philosophy, in general, with the concept of totality, stating: “The visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates Western philosophy. Individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves. The meaning of individuals (invisible outside of this totality) is derived from the totality.” (Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority}, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 21-22).} the systematic reductions of positivism and idealism as complicit in the spread of fascism and capitalism (Horkheimer and Adorno);\footnote{Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment}, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jophcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).} European abstract moral universalism as supporting western dominance and colonialism (Fanon);\footnote{Franz Fanon, \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008).} the ontology of Classic Greco-Roman philosophies as “the foundation of the ideologies of the empires” used to justify “their domination from the horizon of Being itself” (Dussel);\footnote{Enrique Dussel, \textit{Philosophy of Liberation}, trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 5-6.} the influence of Cartesian philosophy within the West’s modern discourse that produced white supremacy (West).\footnote{Cornel West, “A Genealogy of Modern Racism,” in \textit{Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity}, 47-68 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982).} In different ways, these critiques and others are primarily directed against a reductive approach, dominant in Western philosophy, and its role—both direct and indirect—in maintaining mechanisms of oppression, domination and control that serve hegemonic systems of power.

In addition to such instances in which forms of totalizing thought in philosophy have influenced the world external to the discipline, Gordon’s account of disciplinary decadence also offers insight into the effects of totalizing thinking on philosophy itself. In critiquing the current state of academia, Gordon identifies the pervasiveness of a decadent attitude as a central issue.
He explains how the specific form of decadence within academic disciplines is manifest in “the ontologizing or reification of a discipline” that has “foreclosed the question of its scope,” a description that resonates with the notion of totalizing thinking and its underlying ontological view.\textsuperscript{38} Indicative of “decaying tendencies” within systems of thought, Gordon describes how a dying discipline becomes susceptible to decadence as it approaches its final gasping moments and attempts to evade the reality of its own degeneration.\textsuperscript{39} Disciplinary decadence is evident in the “self-insulating practices” and “self-circumscribed…aims and methods” that disciplines adopt when they “lose sight of themselves as efforts to understand the world and have collapsed into the hubris of asserting themselves as the world.”\textsuperscript{40} The general sentiment during this time of decay is: “If you don’t think the way we think, you are not actually thinking.” Ironically, one of the consequences of the declining significance of evidence that Gordon describes is a kind of non-thinking, in which, citing José Ortega y Gasset, “the commonplace mind...has the assurance to proclaim the rights of the commonplace and to impose them wherever it will.”\textsuperscript{41}

That an academy rife with decadence entails a declining significance of evidence is apparent in the seemingly self-fulfilling delusion that sustains disciplinary decadence. By asserting itself as the world, a discipline can justify to itself dismissing in toto countervailing evidence—whether about a particular theoretical assumption or the limitations of its scope—solely in virtue of it not originating from one’s own discipline.\textsuperscript{42} Rather than being concerned by

\textsuperscript{38} Gordon, \textit{Disciplinary Decadence}, 4-5.

\textsuperscript{39} Gordon, \textit{Disciplinary Decadence}, 2-3.

\textsuperscript{40} Gordon, \textit{Disciplinary Decadence}, 8.

\textsuperscript{41} José Ortega y Gasset, \textit{The Revolt of the Masses} (New York: Norton, 1932), 18, quoted in Gordon, \textit{Disciplinary Decadence}, 21.

\textsuperscript{42} Gordon, \textit{Disciplinary Decadence}, 33.
the lack of critical interdisciplinary engagement, decadent practitioners “delude themselves that
the elimination of opposition…is the achievement of epistemic immortality.”43 This delusion
operates like an individual who, in going blind, interprets their gradual failure to see the world as proof of the world ceasing to exist.

As noted, there are similarities between Gordon’s description of the “decaying tendencies” within decadent disciplines that have ontologized their disciplinary perspective and the notion of totalizing thinking in methodological closure. The kind of non-thinking that characterizes a decadent discipline, which asserts itself “as the world,” recalls the threat of stasis posed by the tendency for thinking to take hold of and make intelligible all that it encounters, i.e., for thought to totalize what it thinks. Such non-thinking can be understood as a consequence of thinking being suffocated—following the language of death and decay—when it is denied the necessary conditions for a living activity.44 Gordon’s use of terms like life and death to describe thought are not merely metaphorical. In explicitly denying that life and death are phenomena limited to the biological, Gordon claims: “what is often forgotten about society and living systems of thought is that everything living must die, and all living things go through processes [of decay] before they die...Although it has correlates in biological notions, this sense of life and death transcends the biological in that it pertains, as well, to ideas.”45 Gordon’s use of the language of decay can be understood as calling attention to the intimate interrelation between thought and the social world. This connection, however, is undermined by the ontological view that underlies totalizing thinking, which assumes a fixed and determinable conception of the

43 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 8.
44 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 6.
45 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 2-3.
“realm of thought.” Such an assumption is ultimately opposed to the ontological reality of thinking, which, as Gordon argues, is conditioned on the intersubjective relations of the social world and the diverse meaning-making activities that constitute the meaning of thought.

When thinking becomes isolated from its social context, as Gordon demonstrates through the declining significance of evidence in disciplinary decadence, this disconnection signals the erosion of thought and the rise of “the commonplace mind.”⁴⁶ Thus, the danger posed by totalizing thinking to philosophy—as a consequence of methodological closure—lies in the way its ontological view undermines the conditions necessary for sustaining living systems of thought by closing them off from the social world. In essence, the problem of methodological closure can be understood in terms of the prerequisites for thought to remain dynamic and vital, conditions which are compromised by the flawed ontological assumptions inherent in the desire to totalize thought through closed methodological frameworks.

Based on the account of totalizing thinking developed thus far, as exemplified by Fukuyama’s defense of Western liberal democracy, and its philosophical expression through Gordon’s concept of disciplinary decadence, a few preliminary conclusions can be tentatively formulated in terms of negating the closure of methodological closure. In order to resist the totalizing tendencies of methodological closure, it is necessary to challenge the fundamental assumption inherent in totalizing thought’s claim to exhaustive comprehension, i.e., the idea that thought is, in principle completable. This idea is at the core of the totalizing nature of methodological closure. The assertion of completeness or totality implies a form of closure with regards to external influence, given totalizing thinking’s purported comprehensive character. In its claim to totality, there is no conceptual space beyond its boundaries. To maintain this

⁴⁶ José Ortega y Gasset, The Revolt of the Masses, 18.
assertion, any form of relationality with that which is “other” or “outside” is denied or concealed. Accordingly, negating the closure of methodological closure involves uncovering and actively sustaining such relationality, creating an opening for the dynamic, mutually constitutive relation between method, content and thinking in which each are understood to be fundamentally incomplete. For philosophy, this “relational incompleteness” is especially significant in virtue of the conception of philosophical thinking presented in the following section.

Reflexivity of Philosophical Thinking

What is distinctive about philosophical thinking is, undoubtedly, a contested issue to which any single answer is unlikely to go unopposed. Nevertheless, a particular conception of philosophical thinking has thus far been implicit in the analysis of method and therefore requires elucidation. According to this tacit conception, philosophical thinking is distinguished from other forms of thinking, notably those aligned with instrumental rationality, on account of its fundamentally reflexive character. Philosophical thinking entails a continuous inquiry of its own nature, a perpetual critical self-examination. In other words, philosophical thinking is thinking that reflects on itself, continually questioning its way of being.

Gordon’s characterization of his own work as “radical thought” captures the reflexivity that grounds this notion of philosophical thinking. According to Gordon, thought is “radical” not just in terms of its “historical political specificity but also in the sense of thought devoted to getting to the roots of phenomena and to a level of self-critique that includes subjecting the method of self-critique itself to inquiry.” In drawing on the etymological meaning of “radical” as “forming the root,” Gordon’s description of radical thinking depicts its reflexivity in the sense

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of thought returning to itself, to its roots, in conducting a self-critique that doesn’t presume an external perspective, as if “from above,” so to speak, but one that remains “rooted” within itself. 48 Michael Monahan describes Gordon’s view of “radical thought” in terms of thinking that “raises critical questions about its own operation, and thus requires a kind of open-endedness that is inconsistent with a commitment to completeness as such.” 49 The reflexivity of philosophical thinking requires that it be fundamentally open and incomplete, thinking as a dynamic process that remains “rooted,” which is to say, immanent. There is an evident connection here to the conception of meta posited in this meta-methodological analysis, which doesn’t position itself external to the domain it takes up as the subject of analysis, “looking down” on its object of study. Instead, the present meta-methodological analysis seeks to take an immanent position to both philosophy and method, a position that reflects and reaffirms the immanent rootedness of philosophical thinking.

While it might seem self-evident as to why an emphasis on the reflexivity of thinking would entail an open-endedness that, in Monahan’s terms, “is inconsistent with a commitment to completeness as such,” it will be useful to make this relation explicit. The connection between reflexivity and incompleteness is exemplified through a scenario proposed by J. W. Dunne, which he begins by imagining an artist who has undertaken the ambitious task of painting “a complete picture of the universe.” 50 Upon completing painting the landscape in front of himself,


50 J. W. Dunne, The Serial Universe (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1938), 29-32. In presenting his theory of the serial universe, the main point that Dunne draws from his allegory of the painter is that “the mind which any human science can describe can never be an adequate representation of the mind which can make that science. And the process of correcting that inadequacy must follow the serial steps of an infinite regress” (32).
the artist realizes an omission: his own presence, since he is himself part of the universe he seeks to capture in his painting. To remedy this oversight, he embarks on a new painting that includes himself in the process of painting the initial picture of the landscape. This recursive process ensues indefinitely, with each iteration including the artist painting himself, *ad infinitum*.

Although Dunne presents this scenario for purposes that differ from our own, it nonetheless usefully illustrates the reflexive moment of realization when the artist recalls his own presence in the universe that he is attempting to paint in its entirety. This moment of awareness prompts the artist to create a new painting, which is then itself something that hadn’t existed in the universe before. This new element—i.e., the painting of the artist painting the universe—must be included in order to capture the universe in its entirety, thus prompting the creation of successive paintings. The reflexivity of philosophical thinking likewise seeks to precipitate such change, potentially yielding novelty, thereby rendering both the object and manner of self-reflection as perpetually indeterminate. *How thinking thinks about itself* as well as *what it thinks about itself* is never definitive, never “the last painting,” so to speak. By acknowledging this inherent incompleteness, philosophical thinking necessitates an ongoing state of openness that makes it “flexible.”

51 Such thinking adjusts in response to the alterations engendered by moments of reflexivity, accommodating the evolving insights derived from its recursive self-examination.

*How Should Philosophy Relate to Method?*

With this understanding of the reflexivity of philosophical thinking and the threat of methodological closure in terms of its totalizing nature, we are better positioned to revisit the

51 The term “flexible” refers to the etymological connotations of “reflexivity” as the capacity to bend or turn back upon itself. *Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “reflexive (adj.),”* last modified November 19, 2021, https://www.etymonline.com/word/reflexive.
initial question regarding philosophy’s relation to method, with attention to how this is informed by the relational conception. It is useful to begin by first elucidating the reasons for presupposing the relational conception of method in formulating a response to this question. The first reason stems from the specific demands of the present meta-methodological analysis, as previously outlined. As an analysis of method that does not take itself to be exterior to its object of study—which, in this case, is the relational conception of method—the hermeneutical circularity of the relational conception cultivates the type of immanent reflexivity called for by this meta-analysis. This is not the case with the procedural conception of method, which, as demonstrated earlier, lacks the capacity to engage in its own meta-methodological analysis. Moreover, beyond the demands of the present analysis, the relational conception of method aligns with the conception of philosophical thinking as fundamentally reflexive. By returning to its “roots,” philosophical thinking not only reflects on its objects of study but also reflects upon itself. Consequently, while the vicious circularity of the procedural conception of method might be congruent with the demands of inquiry in other domains, such as the sciences, it proves incompatible with the demands of philosophical inquiry insofar as philosophy is concerned with, among other things, the conditions of inquiry itself.

Furthermore, as previously alluded to, philosophy’s relation to method should not be modeled on the relation the sciences have toward their own methodological approaches. Given the inherently indeterminate nature of philosophy’s object domain and the reflexivity of philosophical thinking, a more dynamic relation to method is necessitated. In this relation, the methods employed by philosophy and the methodological orientations philosophy adopts remain open and unfixed. In other words, neither the method nor the commitment to it are static. One way to formulate what this entails for philosophy’s relation to method is through Gordon’s
notion of teleological suspension, proposed as a response to the problem of disciplinary
decadence wherein systems of thought decay as a consequence of disciplines ontologizing of
their own disciplinary perspective. In the face of such dying systems of thought, what is called
for are the conditions necessary for thinking to be a living activity. Gordon argues that such a
task “often requires acts of disruption.” 52 Methodologically, such disruption takes the form of
teleological suspension, which is modeled on the condition of radicality in phenomenological
reflection that “paradoxically requires not engaging it as a condition.” 53 Gordon continues: “this
means that the agent of such activity must not presume the validity of his or her method.” 54 With
regards to philosophy, the disruption of teleological suspension requires that philosophy
“[suspend] its own centering because of a commitment to questions greater than the discipline
itself. Ironically, when philosophers do this—attempt to think beyond philosophy to greater
commitments—they ironically breathe life into philosophy’s gasping lungs.” 55

As philosophy thinks beyond itself, engaging in a practice of questioning that is driven by
its commitments to things greater than itself, it becomes receptive to the constraining conditions
of evidence, which entails a discursive openness to opposition. Thinking is thus able to breathe
insofar as we are willing “to engage the frightening evidence of our own conceptual limitations
and to realize in such limits, the magnitude of all that transcends us.” 56 This appeal to embrace
our own conceptual limitations and question the scope of our comprehension stands in contrast to

52 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 6.

53 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 7.

54 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 7.

55 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 34.

56 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 33.
the assumed exhaustiveness of totalizing thinking’s scope that characterizes methodological closure. Through acts of teleological suspension, an opening is created by the demand to engage with one’s own conceptual limitations, an opening which reflects thought’s own form of resistance as something “fundamentally incomplete.”  

This notion of epistemological resistance was raised earlier in developing the relational conception of method, in which the reflexive, interdependent dynamic between method, object of study and thinking involves a continual formative process of negotiation and adjustment as each component refuses the completion of the others, thereby maintaining the indeterminacy of thought. The discussion of the relational conception of method was situated within the context of Gordon’s account of the challenge posed for the meta-reflective social theorist, an account which is primarily grounded in Gordon’s analysis of Paget Henry’s work in the sociology of philosophy. Gordon presents Henry’s work as exemplary of a practice of teleological suspension, demonstrating how such acts of suspension can be effectively implemented. By juxtaposing Henry’s intellectual development to the more conventional approach of Randall Collins in the sociology of philosophy, Gordon identifies three overarching themes in Henry’s scholarship that support a practice of teleological suspension. These themes include: “an implicit critique of inside-outside analyses of thought,” “a metareflective understanding of the social theorist,” and, an understanding of “the subjects of human study [as] fundamentally incomplete.” Gordon’s characterization of Henry’s scholarship as a phenomenological sociology of philosophy is informative, as it indicates the ways in which these themes are partly shaped by the influence of

57 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 125.
58 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 124.
59 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 124-125.
phenomenology. Unlike Collins’s sociological analyses, which treat philosophy and philosophers “as aggregates instead of as social,” Henry adopts an approach that recognizes the intersubjective constitution of the social world. Henry’s approach is not only concerned with “what philosophers do,” but also with “what philosophers mean and how, in generating meaning, they also play a role in generating new subjects, including themselves.”

On account of this phenomenological understanding of meaning-making, the need for a “metareflective understanding of the social theorist,” i.e., the second theme, emerges as a result of the way in which the social theorist is “constituting human phenomena while and through studying them.” When this view is paired with an understanding of humans as “fundamentally incomplete,” the consequence, according to Gordon, is that “what emerges from a sustained investigation of them is their resistance to epistemological closure.” Thus, for the metareflective social theorist, the challenge is to engage with the inherent indeterminacy of all living things, both humans and systems of thought, at the methodological level. It is on account of this challenge that Gordon explains why “Henry’s work always ends…with questions, the discursive appeal to possibility. In this sense, Henry’s methodological assumptions are paradoxically open.” The methodological openness that is maintained by “the discursive appeal to possibility” through Henry’s practice of questioning can be understood as addressing the need to make thinking a living activity insofar as it recognizes that thoughts, like humans, reflect their

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60 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 124.

61 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 124.

62 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 125.

63 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 125.

64 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 125.
own forms of resistance, i.e., that they too are fundamentally incomplete. Thus, while both the meaning of thought and the human being are constituted within and by the social world, their indeterminacy thwarts the possibility of their totalization; as living, both always point beyond themselves, are always more than that by which they are constituted, transcending even the most precise description. This is, indeed, the essence of the paradox at the heart of human studies. Through this framing of the paradox, a more direct link can be made to Gordon’s appeal for the necessity of teleological suspension. Given that the paradox arises from a recognition of the inherent indeterminacy of the human, teleological suspension can be construed as a mechanism to facilitate the manifestation of thought’s own indeterminacy. In essence, teleological suspension, as a response to the paradox of human studies, represents an act of transcendence that takes seriously the indeterminacy of thought. This is evident in the way in which the paradoxical condition that characterizes the radicality of teleological suspension parallels the conditions out of which the paradox of human studies emerges: because the condition of suspending one’s methodological commitments is never fulfilled, it is a condition that resists its own totalization, just as the subjects of human study resist their own epistemological closure. Both are fundamentally incomplete, determinate only in their indeterminacy.65

Given this deeper understanding of the connection between teleological suspension and the paradox of human studies, let us revisit Henry’s methodological response to the challenge posed to the metareflective social theorist. By always concluding his analyses with questions, which, as Gordon argues, signify a “discursive appeal to possibility,” Henry effectively fosters a

65 I am here paraphrasing an expression Gordon uses in his explication of Fanon’s rejection of ontology. Fanon, Gordon argues, “did not entirely reject ontology,” he only rejected “a fundamental ontology,” offering instead an “existential ontology,” which is grounded in the “incompleteness of the self,” such that his “ontology was paradoxically a determinate indeterminacy; its only claim was that it was incomplete.” Disciplinary Decadence, 120.
methodological openness in his work, cultivating the conditions for the metareflective stance required for a social theorist who is “constituting human phenomena while and through studying them.”66 Within the context of the current examination of method and philosophical thinking, it is pertinent to ask: what does the metareflective stance entail at the meta-methodological level? Or, alternatively, how might we conceptualize a meta-methodological position, and what would be required for maintaining the openness of such a position? Following the example set forth by Paget Henry, I turn to a consideration of a practice of questioning in philosophy as the condition for developing the openness of such a meta-methodological orientation as part of the relational conception of method.

A Praxis of Questioning as Immanent, Incomplete and Reflexive

To evaluate the concept of a practice of questioning and explore its role in generating the conditions necessary for fostering a meta-methodological orientation grounded in the relational conception of method, the following section examines three different accounts of questioning, identifying particular features of questioning that each emphasizes with the aim of developing an account of questioning as a meta-methodological practice that sustains the open and dynamic reflexivity of philosophical thinking. First, I examine Louis Althusser’s meta-philosophical reflections on the practice of philosophy, highlighting his account of the opening created by questions and the way this is achieved without the philosopher assuming an external position to their own practice. In other words, it presents an account of questioning as immanent to philosophical thinking.67 Subsequently, I present Gadamer’s analysis of questioning, which

66 Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence, 125.

emphasizes how the indeterminate nature of philosophical thinking is reflected through a practice of questioning that is itself fundamentally incomplete, entailing a commitment to “questioning ever further.”

Lastly, Michel Meyer’s argument for “the radicalization of questioning,” draws attention to the reflexivity of questioning as a practice that is specific to philosophical thinking *qua* thinking that reflects on the conditions of thought itself.

*Althusser: Immanent Questioning Within the Circle of Philosophy*

In his work, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, Althusser develops a metaphilosophical account that posits immanence as a fundamental feature of the practice of philosophy that governs its “manner of being.” The significant role immanence plays in the basic framework Althusser develops is evident in his description of philosophical practice as “producing results *within itself*,” and, through such internal effects, philosophy “acts *outside of itself*.“ This “outside” on which philosophy indirectly acts is not, however, an entirely separate domain, dissociated from philosophy. Rather, it pertains to the domain of theory, which encompasses philosophy within its scope. Thus, Althusser argues, “philosophy itself is part of the conjuncture in which it intervenes…it exists within the ‘Whole.’” As a consequence, philosophy “cannot entertain an external, purely speculative relation, a relation of


70 Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 73. This text is based on a series of public lectures that Althusser gave at the École Normale Supérieure in 1967 to an audience primarily composed of scientists, as the title suggests, as well as other non-philosophers.


72 Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 104.
pure knowledge to the conjuncture, because *it takes part in this ensemble.*”\(^{73}\) Moreover, consistent with the idea that philosophy does not exist outside the theoretical domain in which it indirectly intervenes, philosophy also does not exist independent of its own practice, leading Althusser to characterize philosophy as being “haunted by practice.”\(^{74}\) It is only in the exercise of philosophy that philosophy actually exists. Consequently, philosophy cannot reflect on itself without already reflecting philosophically. To borrow an expression from Gordon, philosophy is unable to think what “this kind of thinking [is] which devotes itself to thinking,” without simultaneously engaging in the practice of thinking philosophically.\(^{75}\) Philosophy, in a sense, cannot escape itself.

This conception of philosophy, wherein it is unable to “radically escape the *circle* of philosophy,” presents a challenge that reveals the paradoxical nature of philosophical inquiry.\(^{76}\) Despite its inability to escape itself, philosophy must nonetheless reflect on itself in order to produce results within itself. This imperative for self-reflection, however, is not a task to be underestimated, since, as Althusser claims, “nothing is more difficult to break through or get around than the obvious.”\(^{77}\) The question, therefore, is how does the practice of philosophy navigate such a task? According to Althusser, the practice upon which the very existence of philosophy is constituted consists in adopting a position, which then assumes the form of

\(^{73}\) Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists*, 104.

\(^{74}\) Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists*, 75.


\(^{76}\) Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists*, 102.

\(^{77}\) Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists*, 134.
theoretical propositions or “philosophical Theses.” These theses, in delineating a position within philosophy, do not have an object—at least not in the conventional sense of scientific objects—but instead have “a stake.” It is for this reason that Althusser describes philosophical theses as existing in a “practical relation of adjustment” to “what is at stake [enjeu]” in the position taken.

By presenting his account of the practice of philosophy in this particular manner, Althusser aims to differentiate philosophy from other “practices” that are structured pragmatically with a specific “end in view.” To elucidate this distinction, Althusser provides examples of what he refers to as “a pragmatist conception of practice,” exemplified, for instance, by a surgeon who “must ‘cut correctly’ if he is to save the patient,” or a mechanic who “adjusts a ‘part’ so that the motor will run.” What distinguishes these pragmatist practices from

78 Althusser, Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists, 74.

79 Althusser, Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists, 77, 104. To clarify, while there are “philosophical objects” in Althusser’s account, they are importantly distinct from scientific objects. In contrast to the objects of a science like astronomy, whose celestial objects are external to and pre-exist astronomical inquiry, the objects of philosophy are internal to the domain of philosophy. Furthermore, an additional reason why Althusser might seek to deny philosophy as having an “object” relates to his critique of conceptions of philosophy as “the science of the Whole” or “a theory of ultimate ends” (81). The philosophical traditions that have assumed such a conception, tend to posit “the Whole” as the philosopher’s proper object or the philosopher as “the specialist of the ‘totality’” (81). Althusser rejects such conceptions of philosophy and so he can be understood as perhaps also seeking to deny philosophy such “objects.” While I agree with Althusser’s motivation for distinguishing philosophy from the sciences, the argument of my analysis does not depend on defending every feature of his metaphilosophical account. Rather, the explication of his argument serves to demonstrate the role of questions within his conception of philosophical practice as inherently immanent.

80 Althusser, Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists, 104. The term enjeu, which has been rendered as “stake” in the expression, “what is at stake,” could also be translated as “what is at issue.” However, Althusser’s discussion of what is at stake in the struggle (i.e., practical relation of adjustment) between existing ideas is connected to his discussion of what is at stake in the class struggle of Marxism, which is central in his later lectures. Based on this connection, which suggests the sense of a risk involved in the struggle, the gambling connotation of enjeu is perhaps better suited. “What is at stake,” accordingly, could be interpreted in the sense of “raising the stakes” or “upping the ante.” (104, 262)

81 Althusser, Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists, 104.

82 Althusser, Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists, 104.
philosophical practice is that the former involve “the action of a subject who ‘adjusts’ or ‘tinkers with’ [bricole] his intervention with an end in view – that is, for the achievement of an aim that ‘exists in his head’ to be realized in the external world.”83 This final point is worth emphasizing since it demonstrates the way in which the practice of philosophy remains internal to itself. Unlike the mechanic, who “knows very well that the motor pre-exists him” and is “completely external to him,” or the surgeon, who “is not part of the patient” on whom he operates, the philosopher intervenes “not in matter (the mechanic), or on a living body (the surgeon)...but in theory...by stating theoretical propositions (Theses)...[which] provokes theoretical effects.”84

This immanent conception of philosophical practice, in which philosophy intervenes in the realm of theory, of which it is a part, recalls Dune’s scenario of the artist attempting to paint everything in the universe. Just as the artist attempts to paint the landscape, of which he is a part, the philosopher proposes theoretical propositions that intervene in theory, of which philosophy is a part. Through creating a painting, the artist affects that which he seeks to paint and must, therefore, begin a new painting that takes into account the previous painting. The theoretical propositions the philosopher proposes provoke theoretical effects within theory, altering the way the philosopher thinks on the matter at hand. What the painter and the philosopher each “see,”—drawing on the etymology of “theory” as relating to vision and sight from the sense of “spectacle” found in “speculation” or “speculative”—in creating their painting or proposing their

83 Althusser, Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists, 104.

84 Althusser, Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists, 105-106.
theoretical propositions, produces effects on account of the immanent reflexivity of their practice.\footnote{Althusser, \textit{Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists}, 104, 86.}

There is, accordingly, a process of adjustment that operates “between the existing ideas—some dominant, others dominated,” so that each position taken within philosophy “modifies other positions,” thereby producing the practical result of opening a space, which “makes visible something that \textit{could not be seen}.”\footnote{Althusser, \textit{Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists}, 87.} What becomes visible in this space are questions, “a question that has not been posed…[which] calls into question the old answers, and the old questions lurking behind them. A new view of things is thus attained.”\footnote{Althusser, \textit{Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists}, 87.} Philosophy can then take up a new position, proposing different theses in response to the new questions, thereby adjusting itself to the practical results it produced within itself, which indirectly intervene in the theoretical domain of which philosophy is part.

Through this understanding of the practice of philosophy as taking a position within itself—a position that is always from a historical, socially-embedded, and embodied perspective—maintains the immanent position of the meta-methodological analysis, while still identifying a space that is opened through a practice of questioning. Althusser’s description of the way in which new questions interact with previously posed questions through “calling into question the old answers,” not only illustrates the immanence of the critical opening created by the practice of philosophy.\footnote{Althusser, \textit{Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists}, 87.} It can also be interpreted in terms of the incompleteness of questioning. The old questions do not disappear once answered but, rather, continue “lurking

\footnote{\textit{Online Etymology Dictionary}, s.v. “theory (n),” last modified April 18, 2022, \url{https://www.etymonline.com/word/theory}.}
behind the old answers.” New questions bring the old answers and questions back to life, so to speak, revising and reconfiguring them in light of the new position taken.

Gadamer: The Incomplete Art of Questioning

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer presents an analysis of questions modeled on the Platonic dialectic, with the aim of elucidating “the hermeneutic priority of the question.” Gadamer posits that the concept of Socratic ignorance, which drives the question-answer structure of the Platonic dialectic, offers subtle yet crucial insight into the nature of questions. According to Gadamer, the dialogues illustrate that, “in order to be able to ask, one must want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know.” This profession of ignorance—to know that one does not know—constitutes a unique form of knowledge based on a bounded, non-absolute openness. While the specific content of what I do not known must, by definition, be undetermined and open, the awareness of this ignorance—i.e., that I know there is something I do not know—implies a boundary on the extent of its indetermination, a limitation evident in the paradoxical assertion, “I know that I know nothing.”

This open-yet-bounded form of knowledge is the precondition for one to be moved or disposed to pose a question. Gadamer’s description of the nature of “every true question” reflects the knowledge conditions out of which the question emerges: “To ask a question means to bring

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89 Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists*, 87.

90 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 362. It is important to clarify that the context of developing the hermeneutical notion of a historically effected consciousness, in which Gadamer presents his analysis of questions, is not directly relevant to my argument concerning the nature of questioning with regards to philosophical thinking. My argument, moreover, does not depend on whether Gadamer’s interpretation of the Platonic dialectic is correct. For a more in-depth analysis of Gadamer’s use of the Platonic dialectic, see: Lauren Swayne Barthold, *Gadamer’s Dialectical Hermeneutics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).

into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled. It must still be undetermined, awaiting a decisive answer…The sense of every question is realized in passing through this state of indeterminacy, in which it becomes an open question.”

The openness of *not knowing* is here reflected in the openness criterion that determines whether a question is a *true* question. In order to substantiate this condition, Gadamer contrasts the “true question” with what he refers to as “apparent” questions, such as pedagogical questions, which are “questions without a questioner,” since to be a genuine questioner requires the form of knowledge of *not knowing*. Yet, as with the knowledge condition for asking questions, “[the] openness of a question is not boundless. It is limited by the horizon of the question. A question that lacks this horizon is, so to speak, floating. It becomes a question only when its fluid indeterminacy is concretized in a specific ‘this or that.’” For Gadamer, the indeterminacy of a question becomes concretized when it is posed, which “implies the explicit establishing of presuppositions, in terms of which can be seen what still remains open.”

This requirement that the indeterminacy of a question be limited by a horizon is demonstrated, once again, by contrasting it to “the slanted question,” i.e., questions that are formulated so as to steer the

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94 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 363. Rhetorical questions are also given as an example of an “apparent” question, since they are questions that not only lack a questioner—for the same reason as pedagogical questions—but also, lack an object. By “object,” we can refer to Gadamer’s claim that questioning involves “revealing the questionability of what is questioned” (363). Since a rhetorical question doesn’t indicate anything “questionable,” because it is asked for the purpose of achieving an effect rather than an answer, it therefore has no object.


response toward a predetermined answer.\textsuperscript{97} Slanted questions—or what might be described as biased or loaded questions—give the impression of concretizing the indeterminacy of what is in question, thereby bounding its openness. However, Gadamer argues, what is in question “is not foregrounded, or not correctly foregrounded, from those presuppositions that are really held.”\textsuperscript{98} The horizon of the slanted question “does not give any real direction” because its bounded-openness “leads us only apparently, and not really, through the open state of indeterminacy…”\textsuperscript{99} Conversely, the horizon of a true question properly foregrounds the “questionableness” of what is in question by making explicit the presuppositions that are held in posing the question, thereby concretizing its fluid indeterminacy.\textsuperscript{100}

Gadamer further develops this account of the openness of the question, extending his interpretation of the Platonic dialectic in terms of questioning as an artform. He explains how the concept of an \textit{art} of questioning is somewhat “peculiar,” as it does not conform to the conventional notion of art as a \textit{techne}, i.e., a craft “by means of which we could master the discovery of truth.”\textsuperscript{101} Unlike other \textit{techne}, the art of questioning does not strive for expertise or excellence to achieve a determinate objective or end. A “practitioner” in the art of questioning does not endeavor to perfect the question, so to speak. Instead, “only the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his questioning, which involves being able to preserve his orientation toward openness. The art of questioning is the art of questioning ever further”—i.e.,

\textsuperscript{97} An example of a slanted question would be asking a co-worker or colleague, “Have you stopped stealing office supplies from work yet?” or, “When did you start responding to emails in a timely manner?”

\textsuperscript{98} Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, 364.

\textsuperscript{99} Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, 364.

\textsuperscript{100} Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, 363, 375.

\textsuperscript{101} Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, 366.
the art of thinking.”

It is in this sense that questioning is a “peculiar” art insofar as it achieves excellence through a determination to persist in questioning, committing oneself to a practice of “questioning ever further.”

The openness of the question is therefore an integral feature of the art of questioning, which requires its practitioners to maintain an “orientation toward openness,” emphasizing the incompleteness of questioning as an ongoing process.

There appears to be a kind of meta-indeterminacy in Gadamer’s account of the art of questioning. The indeterminacy inherent in the “fundamental nature of a question”—which is to “make things indeterminate”—is also found at the level of questioning as a practice: one does not know where a persistence in questioning will lead and so remains open to the indeterminacy in “questioning ever further.”

In the context of the practice of philosophy, the incompleteness of questioning as an ongoing process does not stem from an epistemological limitation, as if the aim of questioning was solely to overcome one’s own epistemic deficiencies, as might be the case with other techne. The incompleteness that drives a persistence in questioning ever further is not, in other words, to be found “within” the thinker. Rather, the incompleteness that underpins a philosophical practice of questioning is a fundamental feature of philosophy itself.

As such, if philosophy only exists in its practice, as Althusser claims, then questioning could be considered an integral component of the essence of philosophy.

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102 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 367.
103 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 367.
104 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 367.
Meyer: The Reflexivity of Radical Questioning

While questioning plays a relatively minor role in Althusser and Gadamer’s larger theoretical projects, it is the focal point of Meyer’s theory of problematology. Accordingly, to explicate Meyer’s concept of radical philosophical questioning, it is useful to first contextualize his argument within the historical analysis he offers concerning the evolution of the prominence of questioning in Western philosophy. In tracing the historical trajectory of questioning from Socrates, through Plato and Aristotle, to Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Meyer delineates how each philosopher suppresses the primacy of questioning.106 For example, although Meyer commends Heidegger for affording questions their greatest prominence, asserting that Heidegger prioritized questioning “perhaps more than anyone else,” Meyer argues that Heidegger ultimately “reduced [questioning] to something else.”107 Initially, questioning in Heidegger is “subordinated to the questioner,” since “the question of Being did not lead Heidegger to ask himself about the being of the question, but…the being through which such a question arises…Man (Dasein) is thus questioned, not insofar as he questions, but to the extent that by this questioning, there can be found a privileged and multiple relationship to Being.”108 Meyer identifies a shift in Heidegger’s focus in his later works from the questioning of Dasein to “the questioning of the history of Being,” such that, “questioning becomes listening to Being, and this silence of listening is made historical by questionings which reveal Being as an


108 Meyer, Of Problematology, 33-35.
A similar silence emerges in Meyer’s analysis of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, which culminates in a quietism that he attributes again to the primacy of questioning being suppressed.109

The repercussions of diminishing the centrality of questioning assume particular significance in Meyer’s account of the “crisis of contemporary philosophy.”111 In this context, philosophers must contend with “the death of the Cartesian subject,” pursuing various avenues as they attempt to reconceptualize the philosophical project.112 Meyer argues that once deprived of its foundational subject, philosophy sought to either explicitly establish a new foundation or, more frequently, implicitly replace it, while disavowing that such a substitute serves as a reinstatement of a philosophical foundation. Some of the paths pursued by contemporary philosophy—regarded by Meyer as likely dead-ends—include the logical positivists’ endeavor toward a “reductionist logico-linguistic” project, mid-20th century French philosophical trends, exemplified by Valéry and Bergson, which emphasized intuition and the nonverbal/active dimension, alongside the quietism of Heidegger and the late Wittgenstein.113 Meyer contends that each response to the crisis of philosophy inevitably makes the same mistake:

> Rather than undertaking directly to study questioning as such, contemporary philosophy has continually reconceptualized it by reducing it to something else, a “reductor” or “reducer,” which has assumed the role of a first principle, but a first principle which never will admit to being what it is. If it had been necessary to state it—language, science, action, or being—as an ultimate answer to the question of principle, the latter would have destroyed itself in its own affirmation. An answer which does not refer to the questioning in which it originates cannot state itself as an answer to the problem of the first principle.

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The question has been veiled, a nonexistent foundation has been imposed, and therefore there was a mistake.\footnote{Meyer, Of Problematology, 58.}

Contemporary philosophy, in other words, has only indirectly addressed the study of questioning by redefining it in terms of something else, what Meyer calls a “reductor” or “reducer.” Such a response to the problem of first principles fails to refer back to the question from which it arises, concealing the question and imposing a nonexistent foundation that misconceives the essence of philosophical inquiry.

Meyer’s rationale for the necessity of addressing the question of philosophy’s foundation mirrors my own argument concerning the need for philosophy to confront its relation to method: just as rejecting method fails to address the problem of methodological closure, so does the rejection of first principles in philosophy. According to Meyer, such rejection ultimately results in positing “the negation of all guiding principles,” as philosophy’s guiding principle.\footnote{Meyer, Of Problematology, 3.} Merely negating method or first principles in an attempt to avoid their undesirable repercussions—such as fostering a rigid and dogmatic account of reason and philosophical thinking—may inadvertently precipitate the very phenomena it aims to negate: the negation of first principles as philosophy’s governing principle or the negation of method as philosophy’s methodological framework.

According to Meyer, following the “fragmentation of thought” in the aftermath of “the death of the Cartesian foundational subject,” philosophy must attend to the question of its foundation, which he reformulates into questioning as philosophy’s foundation.\footnote{Meyer, Of Problematology, 2-3.} To justify this
assertion, Meyer reflexively grounds it by posing the question, “what is more primary in questioning what is primary than questioning itself? Anyone who would doubt this would still be questioning.” He further develops this justification in a similarly reflexive manner: “that which emerges first in the inquiry as to what is first is questioning itself, through whatever question is posed. To be able to answer from the beginning about the beginning itself, as is our goal, it is necessary to be able to form an answer on the beginning itself, an answer which, whatever it could be, brings us back to the underlying question, therefore to questioning itself.” This reflexive form of argumentation concerning questioning as foundational to philosophical practice constitutes the first principle of Meyer’s theory of problematology. The second principle is what he refers to as the “problematological difference,” which emerges from his account of the question-answer pair and distinction between problematological and apocritical answers.

According to Meyer, apocritical answers resolve and suppress the questions to which they respond and are, for this reason, characterized as final insofar as the question is eliminated by the apocritical answer. Moreover, once the question that originally prompted the answer is eliminated, the answer is able to become autonomous, disconnected from its questioning ground.

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117 Meyer, Of Problematology, 18.

118 Meyer, Of Problematology, 5-6. It is important to qualify my use of Meyer’s theory of questioning. In particular, using Meyer’s account of questioning to demonstrate its inherent reflexivity is not dependent on adopting his argument concerning questioning as philosophy’s first principle or his broader position on questioning as fundamental to all thought.

119 This distinction of the principles of Meyer’s theory of questioning is based on Nick Turnbull’s analysis of Meyer’s theory of problematology, which he summarizes as follows: “Problematology is based on two key principles, the principle of questioning and the problematological difference. The first element provides a foundation to Reason. The second element, deduced from it, is an entirely new conception of logical difference, involving a reconceptualization of the question-answer pair.” Michel Meyer’s Problematology: Questioning and Society (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 25.)
a process that Meyer refers to as the “autonomization of answers.”120 By becoming “self-sufficient” in relation to the question, apocritical answers are “free from any problematicity, since the initial problem…has been solved through them and disappears as such.”121 This more familiar conception of answers and their relation to questions is but one aspect of the question-answer relation. In contrast to the finality of apocritical answers, problematological answers are “partial” to the extent that they “refer back to the questions they express and to those they give rise to.”122 Problematological answers thus maintain the questioning process in a state of openness, illustrating the dynamic nature of questioning, wherein “the questioner proceeds from question to answer, each answer sustaining the research…by being itself a new question, or at least, by giving rise to one. Each answer is but a step in the whole process and each expresses a new question by not being the final answer which brings the inquiry to an end.”123 Instead of categorizing apocritical and problematological answers as distinct types, their dialectical nature can be more accurately captured by an understanding of them as different properties of answers. It is in this dialectical sense that “an answer is both apocritical and problematological,” albeit not with regards to the same question.124 As Meyer explains, “an answer is apocritical in regard to the question which gave birth to it, and problematological in regard to another one.”125

120 Meyer, Of Problematology, 6.


124 Meyer, Of Problematology, 220.

125 Meyer, Of Problematology, 212.
For philosophy, this distinction helps to recast the crisis as, in part, a result of continually prioritizing the apocritical at the expense of the problematological. James Golden and David Jamison interpret Meyer’s account of philosophy’s crisis in this way, explaining how “the philosopher’s quest has become a vain one, a search after final answers, ignoring the vital connecting steps which lead systematically to those answers. The apocritical focus misleads us; it answers but it hides.” To be clear, because of the dialectical relation of the apocritical and the problematological, the solution to the crisis is not to eliminate the apocritical, but simply demote it as the primary answer form for philosophy. Furthermore, if apocritical answers are understood as producing “constancy and identity” by repressing the question and becoming autonomous from it—in contrast to the contingency and ambiguity generated by the problematological—then to exclude the apocritical from philosophical inquiry would be to leave it with nothing more than pure contingency, thinking without the stability of identity. Meyer, for this reason, is critical of some of the “vehement rejections” of positivism and its project of aligning philosophy with the sciences through elevating the apocritical. In response to the failure of positivism, attempts to negate the apocritical ultimately struggle to find “stable footing” due to an inadequate understanding of the dialectical relation between the apocritical and problematological. In particular, if positivism amounts to a philosophy incapable of considering “the problematological difference for its own sake,” then the rejection of positivism—particularly 20th century French postmodern philosophy, which Meyer at times refers to as “the historicity of nihilism”—led

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philosophy to realize “its own inability to state the problematological.” However, because this realization arises from an effort to negate the apocritical, philosophy can only conceive of its inability to articulate the problematological difference “as a crisis” and, as a result, devolves into “discourse about impossible discourse.”

According to Meyer, the resolution to philosophy’s crisis involves prioritizing the problematological through embracing radical questioning as central to philosophical practice. To appreciate the implications of Meyer’s proposal for resolving philosophy’s crisis, we must first elucidate his account of philosophical answers as fundamentally problematological. Philosophy’s “distinctive characteristic,” Meyer claims, is that “there would always be a multiplicity of possible answers, since a problem is never exhausted but instead is posed again and again, giving rise to other solutions, and so on.” What distinguishes a problem as distinctly philosophical is its nature as “a question whose answer is its own thematization.” In other words, the philosophical question does not disappear in its answer. Rather, it is expressed by it. Hence the term, “problematological,” which combines logos and problema in order to capture this aspect of answers as “expressions of problems,” as opposed to solely “expressions of solutions.”

129 Meyer, Of Problematology 47, 58.

130 Meyer, Of Problematology, 57.

131 Meyer, Of Problematology, 11.

132 Meyer, Of Problematology, 64.

133 Meyer, Meaning and Reading: A Philosophical Essay on Language and Literature (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1983), 27. It is interesting to note the etymology of “solution” from the Latin solver, meaning “to dissolve,” which is related to the alternative usage of “solution” as a liquid containing a dissolved substance. Accordingly, the more common understanding of “answer” as an “expression of a solution,” could be rephrased as an “expression of that which dissolves a problem.” This expanded meaning of “answer” highlights the contrast with the alternative meaning that Meyer proposes with his notion of problematological answers as “expressions of problems.” Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “solution (n. adj.),” last modified March 7, 2023. https://www.etymonline.com/word/solution.
Answering philosophical questions *philosophically* is thus fundamentally problematological: philosophy answers its questions by “unfolding the question in the answer,” “digging into it, exploring it, and bringing it to light.”134 The problematological, Meyer claims, has the “peculiar nature of bringing the unthought out from thought, of setting forth alternatives, of creating a realm of relationship and meanings.”135 The alternative responses that emerge as a result of the problematological exemplifies its contingency generating function, in contrast to the stability and identity provided by the apocritical. But, more importantly, Meyer’s account illustrates how problematological responses enable the questioning process to continue by being partial and not final answers, giving rise to new questions as the question unfolds in the answer. It is in this way that a problematological answer to a philosophical question makes manifest the indeterminacy of the question, that the question is not exhausted by the answer but is, rather, expanded by it, enlarged into “a realm of relationship and meanings” that bring “the unthought out from thought,” which is to say, they call into question the *unquestionableness* which underlies the question.136

In light of Meyer’s proposal to establish the problematological as a fundamental feature of philosophical questioning, what remains unclear is the rationale behind the imperative for philosophy to engage in radical or reflexive questioning, i.e., “questioning questioning.”137 Such an undertaking consists in philosophy taking its own questioning as its object, thereby calling into question philosophical questioning. This constitutes a central claim of Meyer’s philosophy

of questioning, which “aims to show that reflexivity is immanent in any process of questioning,”
but that, for philosophy, this reflexivity must be made explicit.¹³⁸

Meyer’s description of political ideology is useful for explicating this condition of
reflexive philosophical questioning by contrasting the irreflexive nature of ideology to
philosophy’s aim of inquiring into the conditions of inquiry, i.e., of questioning dogmatic
presuppositions, including its own. To clarify, my claim is not that inquiring into the conditions
of inquiry is philosophy’s only or most fundamental aim or that philosophy has always
successful achieved, or even sought to achieve, such a goal. Rather, the idea is that so long as
philosophy’s self-conception includes, among other things, defining itself in opposition to
dogmatic presuppositions—even questioning this definition in effect affirms it—then a practice
of questioning, as a philosophical mode of inquiry, must reflexively question the conditions of its
questioning.¹³⁹

Within the framework of his theory of problematology, Meyer presents an account of
ideology, “understood stricto sensu, i.e. as political,” which he defines as a “legitimation system”
that functions as a “particular way of handling ideas…so that some reality, also captured by
ideas, remains unchallenged, that is, out-of-the-question.”¹⁴⁰ He proceeds to explicate how
ideology handles ideas, with certain ideas playing a legitimizing role such that they bestow

¹³⁸ Meyer, Of Problematology, 218.
¹³⁹ Debates about the role of dogmatism are found in analytic epistemology, but these are primarily concerned with
the role of dogmatic beliefs with respect to certain domains of knowledge, but not in reference to philosophy itself.
philosophy, arguing that a certain amount of dogma is necessary to motivate philosophical inquiry, comparing
philosophers’ search for principles or truth as akin to religious faith in God. “The Role of Dogma in Philosophy,”
¹⁴⁰ Meyer, Meaning and Reading, 96.
legitimacy on all other ideas but, “as the source of legitimation, these ideas cannot be legitimate, i.e., they cannot apply to themselves the criteria of legitimacy they define,” which is to say, “these ideas are illegitimate in their own terms, i.e., reflexively.” The challenge that emerges from this “rather awkward condition” of ideology is further complicated by the specific way in which “ideology presents itself as a world view” that is defined “by its closure, i.e., its ability to offer an answer to any question which could arise or be of any concern.” Together, these features make up what Meyer refers to as the “two fundamental requirements [that] dictate the logic of ideology: (a) ideology’s pretension to answer all possible questions; and (b) its requirement that it never be directly under the fire of questioning.” We can recognize in the logic of ideology’s first requirement similarities to the totalizing thinking of methodological closure, which entails a similar comprehensive “pretension” or global scope that assumes method is all that is needed for thinking, just as ideology presents itself as all that is needed to answer any question. The closure of an ideology’s worldview would appear to be directly undermined by the irreflexivity of the legitimating ideas, since questions raised about the legitimation of those ideas cannot be answered. The conflict that arises, in other words, is that the foundational ideas of ideology, which function to legitimate other ideas in order to support the totalizing worldview’s claim to be able to answer all questions, are unable to legitimize themselves and therefore cannot answer questions about their own legitimacy. Ideology resolves this conflict by seeking to conceal the ideological nature of its legitimizing ideas, which “must remain covert to

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141 Meyer, Meaning and Reading, 96.
142 Meyer, Meaning and Reading, 96, 98.
143 Meyer, Meaning and Reading, 98-99.
be operational,” through representing them “as out-of-the question.” The necessity of remaining “out-of-the question,” therefore, derives from the inability of ideological ideas to be reflexively legitimized according to their own criteria of legitimacy. They must, for this reason, remain implicit and unquestioned, the “groundless grounds” of ideology’s legitimation system.

Through this link between the irreflexivity of legitimating ideas to that which is unquestionable or out-of-the-question, we can more clearly discern the nature of radical questioning that Meyer posits for philosophy and the requirement to make explicit its reflexivity. As demonstrated in the case of ideology, the need to represent legitimating ideas as “out-of-the question” derives from their irreflexivity, which must be suppressed so as to enable them to persist as dogmatic presuppositions that implicitly underlie its legitimation system. For philosophy, the imperative to make explicit the reflexivity of its practice of radical questioning can be reformulated as a demand to foreground the questionableness of the out-of-the-question. Recalling Gadamer’s description of slanted questions as failing to properly foreground “what is in question” from the presuppositions held in posing the question, we can interpret Meyer’s condition of radical philosophical questioning as seeking to root out such slanted questions or, perhaps, the ‘slantedness’ of questioning in which presuppositions remain out-of-the-question. This condition for radical questioning, moreover, is consistent with the notion of radical philosophical thinking, which was defined as being “rooted in” itself such that it can “bend back” on itself, reflecting on and questioning its own “root system.” To extend the botanical metaphor, if legitimizing ideas represent the roots of an ideology, then their irreflexivity represents a rigidity that is needed to compensate for a shallow root system. Conversely, the reflexivity of

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144 Meyer, Meaning and Reading, 97-98.
145 Meyer, Meaning and Reading, 96.
radical philosophical questioning could be represented by something like a banyan tree, with its aerial roots growing from its branches and returning to the ground: branches becoming roots and roots forming branches. For philosophical questioning to not only not question itself but stipulate that its questioning remain out-of-the-question, would be for philosophical thinking to be cut off from its roots, no longer radical but linear and closed. A similar disconnection was discussed in the context of the ontology of totalizing thinking, which isolates thought from the social world on which it is conditioned. For philosophical thinking to think it must maintain and make explicit the relationality of its “rootedness,” questioning its practice of questioning so as to deepen its “root system” that sustains it as a living system of thought. The questionableness of questioning must remain in question in order for philosophical thinking to reflexively sustain the kind of immanent tension that underlies the dynamic indeterminacy of the relational conception of method.

**Philosophy’s Meta-Methodological Criterion**

In light of the preceding exposition of philosophical questioning as immanent, incomplete and reflexive, the question that remains is how these approaches to questioning inform our understanding of philosophy’s relation to method and enable us to address the challenge of negating the totalizing nature of methodological closure. We can begin to answer these central questions of the analysis by recalling how the hermeneutic circularity of the relational conception of method necessitates a more active, dynamic and interconnected relation between method, content and thinking, wherein none become fixed and static, but instead continually shape and inform each other.

A recurring, central theme of the analysis is the assertion that the relational conception of method aligns more closely with the posited notion of philosophical thinking than the procedural
conception. The two primary reasons offered in support of this claim were: 1) in contrast to the predetermined scope of scientific inquiry, philosophy’s domain of inquiry lacks such predetermine boundaries; and 2) the inherent reflexivity of philosophical thinking is consistent with the dynamic reflexivity of the relational conception’s meta-methodological analysis. However, one might still be skeptical concerning the implications of the relational conception of method for philosophy? Specifically, if method is dynamic and changing in relation to its object of study, what prompts such changes, and does sustaining an openness to methodological revisions necessitate an acceptance of them? In other words, how does one maintain a critical openness to the dynamic and changing nature of method?

A practice of questioning, understood as reflexively immanent to philosophy, functions as a form of praxis aimed at fostering the dynamic reflexivity of the relational conception of method. For instance, the open-yet-bounded form of knowledge that Gadamer identifies as the precondition for posing a true question, serves to demonstrate how questioning can prompt the methodological changes that bring a method’s unsettledness into the open, allowing its indeterminacy to be foregrounded. By remaining open to questioning, methods can become problematized or, in Meyer’s terminology, the problematological aspect of methods can be given prominence, thereby stimulating philosophical thinking in the process of questioning its methods and methodological commitments. Maintaining an openness to the indeterminacy of methods through a practice of questioning does not automatically imply an imperative to acquiesce to every methodological change. Rather than framing this question solely in terms of acceptance, we might instead underscore its relationality by regarding such alterations as integral to a process of adjustment and co-adaptation between methods, content and the activity of thinking, as per Althusser’s exposition. Changes in method have the potential to reconfigure the object of study,
consequently altering the way it is thought. Therefore, any revisions must remain in dialogue with all components of inquiry.

With regards to the task of negating the totalizing nature of methodological closure, we can consider the role of questioning within philosophical thinking and its relation to method as operating at two different levels. Initially, within the level of philosophical practice, questioning manifests as a form of praxis that cultivates thinking as actively in relation to method, reflexively incorporating thought’s formative relation to method and object of study. The incomplete nature of questioning, which we discussed in terms of Gadamer’s account of the art of questioning ever further, curtails a passive relation to method by instigating moments of critical reflexivity that can act as the impetus for taking up the charge of teleological suspension. Questioning, and specifically philosophical questioning as problematological, serves as a “reminder” of sorts to suspend one’s methodological commitments by foregrounding their questionableness. In other words, unquestioned methodological commitments are put into question, foregrounding the indeterminacy that stems from the immanent reflexivity of the relational conception of method. A praxis of philosophical questioning negates the closure of methodological closure through undermining a passive relation to method that enables totalizing thinking’s comprehensive claim. To practice the “art of questioning,” as Gadamer argues, requires that I actively preserve my “orientation toward openness,” which involves attending to the indeterminacy of method in relation to thinking and the object of study.\(^\text{146}\) Because the art of questioning is only “mastered” through maintaining this orientation toward openness, the only commitment that philosophical questioning entails is a commitment to the incompleteness of philosophical questioning.

\(^{146}\) Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 367.
This is not to say that philosophy is nothing more than a practice of questioning. It is certainly more than just a domain of inquiry that simply “asks questions.” However, the praxis of questioning I propose seeks to emphasize the role of philosophical questioning specifically in terms of philosophy’s relation to method. At this first level, at least, the aim of questioning is directed at philosophy’s methods, so as to negate the totalizing closure entailed by the assumption that any single methodological framework is all one needs to think. In remaining open to the dynamic relations of adjustment between method, object and thinking—suspending one’s commitment to a method by continually questioning the questionableness of method—the totalizing nature of methodological closure is negated by undermining the assumption of a methodological framework as comprehensive and exhaustive.

Moreover, at the second level, I argue that questioning also serves as a meta-methodological criterion for defining philosophy’s methods. What this entails is that for a method to be considered philosophical, it must have the capacity to call itself into question, i.e., to suspend itself. The phenomenological method offers an example of this meta-methodological questioning, as evident in Gordon’s use of it for his account of teleological suspension. Questioning as a meta-methodological criterion entails a similar condition of radicality for determining what methods could be counted as “properly” philosophical. The totalizing nature of methodological closure is therefore negated at both the level of practice as well as the level of method itself, using questioning as an immanent, incomplete and reflexive praxis to guide philosophy’s relation to method.
Chapter 3

A Phenomenology of Method’s Spatial and Temporal Dimensions

Insofar as we inherit that which is near enough to be available at home, we also inherit orientations, that is, we inherit the nearness of certain objects more than others, which means we inherit ways of inhabiting and extending into space.

— Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*

Affective hesitation can thus make felt the historicity, contingency, and sedimentation of habitual actions and perceptions, as well as their plasticity.

— Alia Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation”

Introduction

Philosophy has a perhaps complicated relationship with method. In a simple sense, if we think of method as that which tells us how to get where we are going, then it would be important, to say the least, to know just where this “where” is so that we can take the best route, i.e., follow the method that will get us there. It is not, however, clear that philosophy operates in such a manner. Unlike the sciences that follow their various “routes” to arrive at the empirical or the arts that follow their own “paths” to arrive at the expressive or evocative, philosophy does not always have its own destination predetermined, at least not in the same manner as other disciplines. Philosophy, we might say, finds its way as it goes, with its route and destination unfolding together.

Given this complicated relationship to method, the question emerges as to how philosophy should engage with and relate to method. It cannot simply follow just any path, aimlessly wandering in the realm of ideas and concepts. Philosophical inquiry, while elusive, is still philosophical in its nature. Thus, the question of method for philosophy is not only, which
direction should we follow? But also: how does following that direction inform and shape both the *where* to which it directs us, as well as the *position* from which we depart and the *places* we’ve already been?

This set of questions on the issue of method highlights the way in which it is fundamentally a relational concept. We could understand this relationality in a pragmatic sense, which would ask: what is the direction that would most effectively enable us to reach where we are going, given the place we presently occupy? Or there is the normative interpretation: what is the direction we ought to follow in order to arrive at where we ought to be going? Both the pragmatic and normative interpretations, however, seem to minimize or neglect the complex relations between these questions. It is for this reason that I propose a different set of relational questions concerning how philosophy engages with method: what are the ways in which the place we currently occupy in the world *informs* the direction we take and the “where” toward which we are directed, as well as how our direction partly *constitutes* the “where” and, in so doing, *reveals* and *transforms* the position we occupy and potentially gives new meaning to those positions we have occupied in the past? Given this relational conception of the set of questions concerning where we are going, the position we currently occupy and the direction we take toward a future that will be shaped by the positions we’ve occupied in the past, the challenge for philosophy is to interrogate its own practice and relation to method, taking into account the present and historical conditions on which it reflects.

Why, one might ask, must philosophy take such conditions on which it reflects into consideration? For one, philosophy does not just reflect *on* these conditions but also reflects *in* them. Philosophical reflection does not occur in a vacuum by timeless and placeless entities. It is done by philosophers, people who exist in a time and a place and who are the product of their
conditions. Philosophy, in other words, does not exist outside of the social, political, material and historical conditions on which it reflects. To assume otherwise is to fall victim to what Nietzsche describes as the “dangerous old conceptual fiction” that he warns philosophers to guard against, which is the idea of a “pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject.”¹ The “absurdity” of such a subject is apparent, according to Nietzsche, in the idea of a perspective-less eye “that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking.”² To think is always thinking from a perspective. The implications this has for philosophy is that rather than striving for a disinterested perspective from which to reflect and theorize, the philosopher should seek “to control” the affects “so that one knows how to employ a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge.”³ One could therefore understand the philosopher as effecting changes within herself so as to philosophically reflect with “more eyes, different eyes.”⁴

In order for philosophy to shed this disinterested self-conception, rebuffing the notion of timeless and placeless philosophical reflection in which the philosopher takes up a supposed “view from nowhere,” then philosophy’s methods must also be recognized as contextually grounded, which will influence how philosophy conceives of its relation to method. In other words, what method means for philosophy must also take into account the contextual elements of method, rejecting the traditional, scientific conception of method as a formal, abstract procedure

² Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, 119.
³ Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, 119.
⁴ Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, 119.
that exists independently of the historical, social and embodied contingencies in which it has been and will be applied. If philosophy is to distance itself from this conception of method, then method must be grounded in a place and a time, which entails accounting for the spatial and temporal dimensions of methods as they guide philosophical inquiry.

The following analysis offers an initial attempt to respond to this challenge by using two different phenomenological analyses to identify the spatial and temporal dimensions of method and the implications this has for philosophy’s relation to its own methodological approaches. To be clear, this is not an analysis of the phenomenological method itself. Rather, I employ two different phenomenological analyses, which do not themselves pertain to method, at least not directly, but that offer insights that help to inform our understanding of method for philosophy. I first apply Sara Ahmed’s phenomenological analysis of orientation to method, using her account of the spatial and temporal dimensions of orientations to identify the spatial and temporal dimensions of philosophical methods. Similar to the comparison between method and orientation, in the second half of the chapter I use Alia Al-Saji’s phenomenological analysis of racializing perception to further develop our understanding of the spatial and temporal dimensions of methods, understood as ways of perceiving, as well as identify potential problems for philosophy to avoid in determining its relation to method.

**The Orientation of Method**

Ahmed presents a phenomenological analysis of the concept of orientation in her book, *Queer Phenomenology*, considering “what it means for ‘things’ to be orientated.” In particular, Ahmed’s analysis revolves around questions related to sexual orientation and racial identity,

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reflecting on what it means “for sexuality to be lived as orientated,” as well as how “the orientation of orientalism” can be used “as a point of entry for reconsidering how racism ‘orientates’ bodies in specific ways.”6 Although Ahmed does not directly examine the concept of orientation in terms of method, questions of methodology are not entirely absent from Ahmed’s analysis. For instance, while Ahmed approaches the concept of orientation through the particular methodological framework of phenomenology, she also turns her analysis back on phenomenology itself, taking it up as an object of study to develop her account of a queer phenomenology that “is not ‘properly’ phenomenological.”7 Consequently, phenomenology serves as both the methodological approach of the analysis and its object of study. It is this latter role of phenomenology that explains the “queering” effect of a “queer phenomenology,” in which Ahmed turns “to phenomenology by asking not only about the concept of orientation in phenomenology, but also about the orientation of phenomenology.”8 The analysis of method I seek to develop can be similarly described as addressing not only the concept of method in philosophy but also the methodological orientation of philosophy, exploring how philosophy’s conception of and relation to method orients philosophical thought and the objects of study toward which it is orientated. Such questions could perhaps lead to a conception of method that, in Ahmed’s terms, might not be “properly” methodological, at least not in the traditional sense.

To understand why Ahmed’s use of phenomenology might not be “properly” phenomenological, it is helpful to see how it diverges from the more traditional use of phenomenology, originally developed by Husserl as a method for studying the structures of

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experience or consciousness. We can see this divergence, for instance, in Ahmed’s use of phenomenology to reflect on itself, asking, “if phenomenology apprehends what is given to consciousness, then what is given within the writing about that apprehension?” In response, Ahmed explores ways in which “phenomenology may be gendered as a form of occupation,” using the consistent appearance of the writing table in Husserl’s texts to wonder what does not appear in his phenomenological reflections: what is behind Husserl that provides the background against which the writing table appears in the present? Ahmed proposes the family home and the domestic labor that supports the work of writing as the background of Husserl’s phenomenological reflections, work which is then concealed, “relegated to the background in order to sustain a certain direction,” i.e., the direction of facing the table as the object of Husserl’s attention.

This example offers a perhaps more literal illustration of how a queer phenomenology “looks ‘behind’ phenomenology,” using the texts in which Husserl developed the phenomenological method to demonstrate the resources immanent to phenomenology, as a method, which enable it to be critical of itself. We might speculate, however, whether phenomenology itself isn’t always a queering praxis and that the “failure to be [properly phenomenological]” isn’t a defect of a queer phenomenology but a virtue. As Ahmed remarks:

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“I suspect that a queer phenomenology might rather enjoy this failure to be proper.”

Accordingly, rather than framing Ahmed’s “improper” use of phenomenology as a departure or break from classical phenomenology, it should instead be understood as a more fully realized methodological orientation to phenomenology, insofar as it actively works toward a phenomenology that is made critical of itself. Ahmed’s project, in this sense, can be understood more generally as seeking to turn phenomenology back toward itself, using phenomenology to develop its own internal reflexivity.

There are additional reasons for connecting method and the concept of orientation. Consider, for instance, the expression “to follow a method,” something one might say in explaining how they achieved, or plan to achieve, certain results, such as an actor stating that they follow the Stanislavsky Method, or an astronomer declaring that they determined the distance of a star by following the stellar parallax method. We might ask: what does it mean to follow a method? Ahmed begins her analysis with a similar question: “What does it mean to be orientated?” In response, she offers an initial, general definition of orientations as what give us “our bearings,” such that “we know where we are when we turn this way or that way.”

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15 See: Lewis Gordon, *Freedom, Justice and Decolonization* (New York: Routledge, 2021). Gordon’s account of the condition of radicality in the phenomenological method aligns with Ahmed’s description of how a queer phenomenology “looks behind” itself. In particular, in explaining how the phenomenological investigation of human experience differs from external phenomena, Gordon writes: “The internal upsurge of the other human being brings with it the values and sufferings of that other human being and these are features that exemplify the paradox of a being whose natural condition is unnatural—in fact, whose being constitutes the unnatural or, as I prefer, queer” (101). In *Disciplinary Decadence*, Gordon reiterates a similar point about the unique methodological conditions of phenomenology through his notion of teleological suspension, which, “paradoxically requires not engaging it as a condition” (7).

also orient us toward “those [objects] that help us to find our way.” This understanding of what it means to “be orientated” offers insight into what it might mean to “follow a method.” Etymologically, method can be understood as a kind of orientation that helps us find our “way” (hodos) in the “pursuit” (meta) of attaining some desired end. Methods provide this assistance of giving us our bearings by turning us in a particular manner toward certain objects. The actor, for instance, might follow the Stanislavski Method in order to give a compelling performance by *turning toward* the character she is playing in the particular manner indicated by the method, e.g., imagining the internal motives of the character. The method gives the actor her bearings as she finds her way in her performance. In philosophy, we can understand methods as orientating thinking, directing philosophical inquiry to *turn* in a particular manner toward this concept or that question. Methods, like orientations, direct us toward “the objects we recognize, so that when we face them we know which way we are facing.”

Moreover, if following a method is like following directions, with the method orienting thought towards the desired destination, then methods offer us a way to *begin* in order to arrive at our destination. Ahmed expands on the meaning of such beginnings and arrivals through a similar account of orientations in terms of giving us directions to follow. When we follow these directions, at least if we follow them well, we arrive as if by “magic,” with the “work of arrival…forgotten in the very feeling that the arrival is magic.” Following, in other words, takes work; if we follow badly, we are not likely to arrive at our destination. So, if we are going

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20 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 16-17.
to commit to doing the work of following directions well, then the act of following a method can be understood “as a form of commitment as well as a social investment.” Accordingly, despite the “magic of arrival” concealing the work required to arrive, the commitment and social investment of following a method or the directions of an orientation persist, such that “we become committed to ‘what’ they lead us to as well as ‘where’ they take us.” Methods, in this sense, are “not disinterested,” since following a method “takes time, energy, and resources.”

Not only are methods starting points that we commit to and are therefore interested in following, but by telling us “how we proceed from ‘here,’” methods also affect “how what is ‘there’ appears, how it presents itself.” A similar account of method is presented by Robert Romanyshyn, in which he expands on its etymological connections to “the images of a path or a journey,” describing method as “a path that one follows into one’s work,” such that “when one designs a method, one is mapping out the journey that one will take from that place of not knowing one’s topic to that place of coming to know it.” Yet, just as an orientation shapes how the “there” toward which one is orientated appears, Romanyshyn notes a similar feature of journeys: “how one goes along the path informs what one will experience of the topos—the topic or place—where one arrives, and how one will experience it.” As ways of being directed, methods and orientations offer guidance for how to begin by directing us toward those objects

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that will help us find our way, clearing paths that we can follow in order to arrive at our destination, the following of which will shape how that destination appears upon arrival. Moreover, the work of following a method entails a commitment and social investment, which is hidden in the “magic of arrival.” This leads us to wonder what else is concealed or fails to appear when we follow a method?

**The Positionality of Method**

If methods tell us “how to proceed from ‘here,’ which affects how what is ‘there’ appears,” then there is a relationality that is formed when following a method. Ahmed examines the nature of the relation between “how we begin” and “where we arrive,” through a distinction she draws between being “orientated toward” and being “orientated around.” Through understanding method in terms of this distinction, I identify what I refer to as the positionality of method, introducing the idea that methods entail a particular position or point of view.

Ahmed illustrates this distinction by calling attention to the etymology of orientation, which refers “to the east itself as one direction privileged over others,” as evidenced by the term “the Orient.” Implicit in this sense of orientate is the point of view of “the West” as the assumed vantage point from which one comes to be orientated through facing “the East.” What this understanding of orientation suggests is that certain points of view are presupposed in the

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27 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 16.


activity of finding one’s bearings in an effort to become orientated, such as the point of view of the West that is implicit in facing east.

Both meanings or aspects of what it means to be orientated can be characterized in terms of how we “find our way” and how we come to “feel at home.”31 If the East is the direction we face when seeking to “find our way,” then by turning toward the East we come to “feel at home” in the West as the vantage point from which we face east. Accordingly, insofar as we are “orientated toward” something, we are also, by implication, “orientated around” something else.32 To be orientated around something, according to Ahmed, “is not so much to take up that thing, as to be taken up by something…to make that thing central, or as being at the center of one’s being or action.”33 It is, however, important to emphasize that being orientated around something is not a different type of orientation from that of being orientated toward. We should instead think of them as different aspects of an orientation in order to appreciate the interrelation between the two. In particular, the direction toward which we are orientated doubles back, implicitly demarcating the center around which we are orientated. This is illustrated in the case of orientalism when we understand the Orient as “the object toward which we are directed,” and, in so being directed toward the Orient, we become “orientated ‘around’ the Occident.”34 There is an interrelation between “orientated toward” and “orientated around,” such that, “the Occident coheres as that which we are organized around through the very direction of our gaze toward

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the Orient.”35 The direction of orientation reveals as much about the center around which we are orientated—i.e., that toward which we are not directing our attention—as it does about the object of our attention. Importantly, however, neither the center around which we are orientated nor the objects that we direct our attention toward preexist the orientation. Both the center we are orientated around and the objects we are orientated toward are constituted as a result of being so orientated. They cohere as a consequence of repeatedly directing our gaze or attention in a particular direction.

With regards to Ahmed’s example of the formation of the East and the West, which she uses to illustrate this distinction, there is a subtle historical point that is worth briefly noting. While centuries of Western imperialism and colonialism are responsible for the formation of the West, and in particular Western Europe, as the center around which “we” are orientated, what was the center prior to this formation? In a geo-historical analysis of the construction of the idea of Europe as the assumed “center,” Walter Mignolo demonstrates how, prior to the fifteenth century, world maps commonly depicted Jerusalem as the explicit center around which Europe, Africa and Asia are orientated.36 Mignolo traces how it is only with the emergence of the “Indias Occidentales,” i.e., the Americas, that the center shifted to Western Europe, giving it the “privileged locus of enunciation,” such that “it is from the West that the rest of the world is described, conceptualized and ranked.”37 What is notable about this shift is that, in contrast to Jerusalem, which was explicitly depicted and acknowledged as the center, the formation of

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35 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 116.

36 Walter Mignolo, The Idea of Latin America (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 35. Mignolo highlights that such maps, referred to as ‘T-and-O’ maps, were not representative of a global consensus but, rather, reflected a Western Christendom worldview and were heavily influenced by Christian cosmology (26).

37 Mignolo, The Idea of Latin America, 35.
Western Europe was a more obscure historical development causing the center to be concealed as the center. A consequence of such concealment is that it becomes more difficult to critique or reflexively acknowledge that which occupies the center. One conclusion we can draw from this greater historical perspective is that the issue is not so much with the creation or emergence of a center, at least not for our analysis of method. The problem pertains to the failure of the center to appear as the center, a concealing or obscuring of the center which enables it to evade critical reflection, an issue I revisit below.

Ahmed’s etymological analysis of orientation elucidates this aspect by demonstrating how orientations are not merely given but are the effect of one’s positionality, the place that one occupies when finding their bearings. My position, however, falls into the background as the objects that give me my bearings become the focus of my attention. My position, in other words, is presupposed, it is a given, despite the fact that it has cohered as a consequence of the direction I am facing, a direction which itself coheres as a consequence of my position. Being orientated, in other words, depends not only on receiving certain points of view but, perhaps more importantly, receiving those points of view as given. This elucidates another aspect of how the work of arriving is concealed by the “magic of arrival,” since, once a point of view is received, the success of adopting the point of view is manifest in its givenness. As Ahmed explains, “the gift of this point is concealed in the moment of being received as given.” In other words, orientations not only conceal what they give me but also that they give me: “when we are orientated, we might not even notice that we are orientated: we might not even think ‘to think’

38 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 14.

39 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 14.
about this point.” To be orientated involves concealing the work of having received a certain point of view, and thereby naturalizing that point of view so that it doesn’t appear as a point of view at all.

In terms of methods, we can understand how a methodological approach not only turns us toward certain objects of study so that we come to recognize them as objects of study, but also how it orientates us around a center that is made coherent as a result of what we are directed toward. In other words, when we adopt a particular methodological stance, we are implicitly presupposing a certain point of view as the very condition for thought to “find its bearings.” In the process of thought finding its bearings through following a method that directs our attention toward certain objects of study, a center coheres as a consequence of and in relation to the direction method turns us toward. This center, which we can understand as a method’s “positionality,” would not explicitly appear as a coherent object of study insofar as our “methodological gaze,” so to speak, is orientated toward that which is not the center. In considering philosophy’s relation to method, we might ask what it is that philosophy is orientated around through the methods philosophers adopt? Or, more generally, what is the center that coheres as a result of philosophy’s methodological orientation? What is the positionality of philosophy’s method that constitutes its “home” as well as the objects of study that cohere as a result of facing them from its home?

While I don’t claim to have definitive answers to these questions, others have attempted to attend to that which falls outside the philosophical gaze, identifying various aspects of philosophy’s concealed center or home. For instance, like the domestic labor that Ahmed “found” in looking behind Husserl’s table, Pierre Bourdieu presents a materialist account of what

he calls the “scholastic view,” asking, “what does our thinking owe to the fact that it is produced
within an academic space?”41 “Behind” the scholastic view are the “economic and social
conditions” that make “studious leisure” possible.42 There is, he argues, a “fundamental
epistemological question” that arises as a result of the “epistemic posture itself, on the
presuppositions inscribed in the fact of thinking the world, of retiring from the world and from
action in the world in order to think that action. What we want to know is in what ways this
withdrawal, this abstraction, this retreat impact on the thought that they make possible and
thereby on what we think.”43 Based on Bourdieu’s account, we could conceive of philosophy’s
“home” in terms of the economic and social conditions that make possible the “leisure” of
philosophical reflection and its “retreat” from “action in the world in order to think that action.”44
Alongside Bourdieu, such conditions constitute philosophy’s “bourgeois beginning,” the point of
departure from which philosophy proceeds and which shape the way philosophy thinks. Ahmed
presents a similar materialist account with what she refers to as “the fantasy of a ‘paperless’
philosophy,” in which the very materiality of the work of doing philosophy disappears, along
with “the labor that allows philosophy to take up the time that it does.”45

We can also consider various decolonial critiques of Western philosophy in terms of
identifying the concealed home or center of philosophy, linking the universalizing orientation of

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42 Bourdieu, “The Scholastic Point of View,” 381.

43 Bourdieu, “The Scholastic Point of View,” 382.

44 Bourdieu, “The Scholastic Point of View,” 382.

45 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 34. Ahmed refers to Audre Lorde’s claim that “a room of one’s own may be a
necessity for writing prose, but so are reams of paper, a typewriter and plenty of time.” Sister Outsider: Essays and
Speeches (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 166.
philosophy with the project of colonialism. Like the colonist who seeks to be “at home” everywhere, Western philosophy demonstrates its own “homesickness,” in Novalis’s sense of the term, as philosophy’s “urge to be everywhere at home.”46 Another manifestation of this universalizing “urge” is the supposed “view from nowhere” that underlies the assumption of a disinterested philosophical perspective. Feminist philosophers, among others, have criticized this “view from nowhere,”— perhaps another home or center of philosophy—arguing that such a “view” covers over the gendered orientation of a masculine philosophy.47 Such critiques, in one way or another, can be understood as identifying the invisible center of philosophy, its home which fails to appear within philosophical reflection because it is the condition upon which such reflection proceeds.

Yet, in addition to describing that around which philosophy is orientated, these accounts also indicate the ways in which that “home” coheres or shapes the objects of study philosophy faces, as well as how those objects shape the position from which they are viewed. There is thus a dialectical relation between the center around which we are orientated and the direction toward which we are orientated. Accordingly, we might wonder how philosophy’s home affects its objects of study. It is useful here to recall Ahmed’s initial account of orientations as giving us our bearings by turning us “toward certain objects, those that help us to find our way.”48 Based on the dialectical relation involved in being orientated, we might suppose that philosophical


reflection is drawn toward certain objects by following the direction of a method. But because this guiding influence of a method doesn’t explicitly appear within reflection—as it is that which directs reflection—philosophy’s objects of study seem to “just” appear, as if waiting to be discovered by thought. But just as Ahmed demonstrated in her example of how the Orient and the Occident congeal and take shape as an effect of the repetition of facing the East from the position of the West, philosophy’s objects of study do not pre-exist the methodical gaze of philosophy but are rather formed and constituted as an effect of this gaze, just as the position of the gaze is itself formed and constituted by the direction it faces.

As a consequence, the philosophical “urge” to “carve nature at the joints” would be misguided insofar as it conceals the behind-the-scenes work that gave rise to philosophy’s objects of study.49 There are no natural joints that method directs philosophical inquiry toward because what method directs our attention toward is constituted as a result of that attention. While this might disappoint some epistemological realists, it nonetheless creates an opening for perceiving the center around which philosophy is orientated. Just as being orientated toward the Orient reveals the Occident as that which one is orientated around, the objects of study that philosophy’s methods orient it toward likewise indicate that which philosophy is orientated around. As a result, the dialectical relation between methods and objects of study makes possible a reflexivity through which philosophy can attend to and be critical of the center around which it is orientated. In other words, despite the positionality of philosophy’s methodological orientation not appearing as an object of reflection, it can nonetheless indirectly take up a critical reflexive position toward its own positionality through the objects toward which it directs its attention.

The Ground of Method (or Method as the Ground)

Method, understood as an orientation that enables philosophical thinking to get its bearings, is neither neutral nor disinterested, as demonstrated by the above critiques of philosophy’s various homes. Ahmed calls attention to this notion by warning that even though orientations provide “the ground into which we sink our feet,” giving comfort in the easy coherency of things as we “sink,” the ground is not neutral since orientations “give ground to some more than others.” Challenging this appearance of neutrality is one of the central aims of Ahmed’s analysis, substantiating her argument that “we do not acquire our orientations just because we find things here or there.” In other words, being orientated is neither disinterested nor the result of arbitrary happenings. There is a history behind the emergence of orientations, conditions that shaped and informed which directions come to be those that are orientating.

Philosophy’s methods cannot, therefore, be assumed to be a neutral, universal ground on which philosophical thought can grasp the truth. Various traditions within philosophy, some of which were discussed in the previous section, have followed this line of argument concerning the non-neutrality of methods. Feminist theory, especially Feminist Standpoint Epistemology, Decolonial theory, Indigenous theory, and Marxist theory are just some of the schools of thought that have developed and contributed to the idea that the dominant, taken for granted position, knowledge, belief system, social structure etc., is neither disinterested nor equivalent to the so-called “universal Truth.” Such traditions seek to uncover the histories of various systems of power that have created and maintained certain centers—whether these be the patriarchy, colonialism, Eurocentrism, capitalism, etc.—which appear as the neutral, default state of affairs.

50 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 160.

Among these traditions, there is an important distinction to highlight, which relates back to our earlier discussion concerning shifting centers. The Marxist tradition appears to differ from the others insofar as it doesn’t solely present a critique of capitalism as the center around which global economic and socio-political structures are orientated. It also endeavors to shift the center toward a historical materialist orientation, which would, unlike the center around which capitalism is orientated, explicitly appear and present itself as the center, thus making possible the reflexive, self-critical move. Accordingly, as noted above, the issue is not with the creation of a center as such but, rather, with centers that conceal themselves as centers. For our analysis of method, the challenge this indicates is the need to generate centers that explicitly appear as centers, enabling philosophy to make the self-critical reflexive move of turning back on and making explicit the center around which it is orientated by a particular methodological framework.

This demand for a reflexive self-critical center, moreover, can be seen as a response to Ahmed’s account of the non-neutrality of orientations, which draws on and contributes to these various traditions of challenging the fiction that one can or should assume a disinterested, universal gaze in order to “find one’s bearings” in seeking to understand the world and one’s own experience of it. We might ask, however, if methods are understood as the ground into

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52 Lenin, for instance, emphasizes in various places the importance of self-critique, as evident in a speech to the Eleventh Congress of the R.P.C., in which he exclaims: “All the revolutionary parties that have perished so far, have perished because they became conceited, because they failed to see the source of their strength and feared to discuss their weaknesses. We, however, shall not perish, because we are not afraid to discuss our weaknesses and will learn to overcome them.” “Eleventh Congress of the R.C.P.(B.), March 27-April 2, 1922,” Lenin Collected Works, vol. 33, August 1921 – March 1923 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 311. In a more theoretical vein, Rastko Močnik argues that it is because Marxism is both a philosophy and a science that historical materialism is necessarily reflexive: “the point of (philosophical) reflexivity is the place of the loss of the (scientific) object…” “From Historical Marxisms to Historical Materialism: Toward the Theory of Ideology,” Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal 14, no. 1 (1991): 119. Richard Gunn attributes the reflexivity of historical materialism to Marx’s understanding of the relation between theory and practice (“Practical Reflexivity in Marx,” Common Sense 1 (1987): 39-51). See also: Gavin Kitching, “Marxism and Reflexivity,” in Marx and Wittgenstein: Knowledge, Morality and Politics, eds. Gavin Kitching and Nigel Pleasants (New York: Routledge, 2002), 231-253.
which philosophical reflection can “sink its feet,” then how did this ground come to be? What is the history behind its emergence, and what are the reasons for its appearance as neutral?

The repeatability of methods, an issue only briefly mentioned thus far, is a central feature of method which offers some insight into its appearance of neutrality. In a very basic sense, a method is only useful if it can be repeated. We might even say that a method isn’t really a method if it can only be used once. The absurdity of such an idea is not simply because we assume methods are, by definition, repeatable. It is also because, like philosophy’s objects of study, methods do not materialize as complete, autonomous “things.” Like orientations, methods are formed as a result of the repetition of certain actions, emerging from a history of work of following a particular direction. It seems questionable, for instance, that Husserl created the phenomenological method all at once, without the influence of the philosophical orientation he was trained in or directed toward. Was there not already a history of facing the object of consciousness that gave shape to it such that the phenomenological orientation emerged alongside it? Methods are not created in a void; they emerge in relation to the directions philosophy has already followed and the objects it comes to face in having followed them.

One of the reoccurring themes in Ahmed’s analysis is this feature of repetition and how the work of repetition comes to be concealed, as was discussed above in terms of the “magic of arrival” and the givenness of a point of view. However, an element of Ahmed’s analysis of orientations that has not been fully developed, and which is relevant to the question of neutrality in relation to the repetition of methods, is the social world and the influence of others on the formation and perpetuation of orientations, as well as the influence of orientations on the formation and perpetuation of social collectives or groups. There are, accordingly, two aspects of Ahmed’s analysis that I wish to highlight in order to deepen our understanding of how methods
might come to appear as a neutral ground for orientating philosophical inquiry: 1) the mechanisms of social enforcement for maintaining dominant orientations based on their supposed naturalness; and 2) the formation of collectives through the repetition of the act of directing our attention in the same direction.53

Ahmed presents an anecdote from her personal experience to illustrate how orientations can become the default, dominant center around which others become orientated, which are then enforced on the basis of being “natural,” as opposed to the result of repetition. Ahmed relates an experience of walking into a restaurant and seeing what she describes as "a shocking image": “In front of me, on the tables, couples are seated. Table after table, couple after couple, taking the same form: one man sitting by one woman around a ‘round table,’ facing each other ‘over’ the table.”54 Such regularity is an effect of and perpetuates what Adrienne Rich refers to as “compulsory heterosexuality,” leaving those who fail to fit the same form “uncomfortable,” or even disorientated.55 The repetition of the heterosexual form contributes to its sense of being merely given, as if it is the natural sexual orientation much like that of being left or right-handed.56 However, the various means of socially enforcing heterosexuality exposes the fiction of there being such a thing as a natural sexual orientation. There is “a fantasy,” Ahmed explains, “of the natural fit between men and women’s bodies, as if ‘they were made for each other’ in the sense of being directed toward the other, or even ready-to-hand, for each other. The very idea


54 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 82.


56 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 86.
that bodies ‘have’ a natural orientation is exposed as fantasy in the necessity of the enforcement of that orientation, or its maintenance as a social requirement for intelligible subjectivity.”\(^{57}\)

In the case of method, we might wonder how the work of repetition reinforces the natural appearance of a method. If method is the “form” or “ground” that orients philosophical reflection, then that orientation can also become naturalized, supporting philosophy’s own kind of “fantasy” that there is a “natural fit” between thought and truth or philosophical reflection and reason. And just as the requirement for socially reinforcing heterosexuality reveals the fiction of its naturalness, philosophy also has its means of reinforcing its own methodological “fantasies.” There are critiques, for instance, of what might be considered philosophy’s fantasy of “universal reason,” which can be reinforced by policing the borders of what counts as philosophy, excluding or labeling philosophy that is grounded in a particular context or culture as inferior.\(^{58}\) The idea of “universal reason,” however, is itself grounded in a specific context—despite denying or acknowledging this fact. Bruce Janz presents an historical account of the development of the dominant, Eurocentric conception of reason associated with Western philosophy. Janz argues that such a conception of reason “did not come from nowhere,” but was rather developed through the historical formations of “the reaction against Aristotelian thought in the Renaissance, through the development of Enlightenment reason, and the rise of positivism…”\(^{59}\) Through his analysis, Janz demonstrates how debates over the methods of reason

\(^{57}\) Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 85.


had specific social, political, religious and material concerns, which shaped the development of a specific conception of reason within the context of Western thought.

Philosophy’s fantasy of a placeless, universal reason comes to be reinforced in a variety of ways. Introduction to Philosophy courses that only include texts from the Western canon, for instance, give the impression that philosophy started in Greece and then stayed in Europe until it crossed the Atlantic to the United States. If such courses were called “Introduction to Western Philosophy,” they would at least identify the particular cultural lens of the texts being taught, and thus the center around which such “universal reason” is orientated. However, by disguising the Eurocentrism and maintaining its appearance as the default, neutral orientation of philosophy, such courses perpetuate the universalist fantasy.

While dominant orientations can be maintained through such mechanisms of social enforcement, there is also the inverse relation in which the repetition of an orientation leads to the formation of a social collective. Returning to Ahmed’s account of the Orient and the Occident, such collectives, she argues, result from “the repetition of this direction over time,” such that “groups are formed through their shared orientation toward an object” by facing the same direction. ⁶⁰ If methods are the means through which philosophical thought comes to face a particular direction, then we can also think of methods as creating collectives or groups within philosophy. This does, in some sense, align with the common understanding of how disciplines and subdisciplines come to be defined according to the methodological orientation of its practitioners. Jesús Aguilar’s account of the internalist approach to classifying different types of philosophy captures this understanding of method, which identifies what is distinctive about a particular type of philosophy on the basis of the “methods embraced by [its] practitioners and not

in features like the place or time in which [its practitioners] lived.” As we saw in the case of “universal reason,” the hazard of this approach is that it fails to challenge the neutral appearance of the method around which a collective is formed. Just as the concept of “universal reason” “did not come from nowhere,” as Janz demonstrated, the formation of collectives through the repetition of directing their attention in the same direction takes place over time and in a particular place. If this context drops out, there is the risk that the methodological orientation of the collective comes to appear as the default, neutral position that one must face in order to “properly” do philosophy.

**Methods as Sticky Objects**

Underlying such questions concerning the effects of repetition is the idea of a method’s history, that methods have histories. We might, accordingly, reframe the discussion in terms of the history of method and what this tells us about its dialectical relation with philosophy’s objects of study. I turn here to Ahmed’s notion of a “sticky object” and how understanding methods as sticky objects offers insight into the influence of their history on the objects of study that philosophy reflects on. Ahmed introduces this notion of sticky objects in the context of amending Heidegger’s etymological analysis of “object,” in which he explains “how an object ‘is’ insofar as ‘it is thrown.’”

Taking issue with the way in which “the word ‘thrown’ risks

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62 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 40. See: Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 90-92. In this earlier text, Ahmed further develops the concept of a sticky object. See also: Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 81-82. The following passage appears to be what Ahmed is referring to with regards to Heidegger’s etymological analysis of “object” in terms of it being thrown: “As we noted earlier, the word *Gegenstand* [‘object’] is the translation of the Latin *objectum*...Lessing translated *objectum* with *Gegenwurf* [‘counter-throw’]. This translation is not only in fact more literal, but also more eloquent, for it speaks of the fact that something has been thrown over against, namely, over against the cognizing subject by this subject itself...‘Over-against’ and ‘object’
turning the arrival of the object into an event,” giving the impression of the object suddenly appearing, with its arrival happening “in a moment,” Ahmed argues that “an arrival takes time, and that the time that it takes shapes ‘what’ it is that arrives.”63 There is, in other words, an arrival process that precedes the appearance of an object and that the conditions of this process shape the object, especially the sticky object, which “picks up” what it has come into contact with such that “its surface ‘shows’ where it has traveled.”64 The metaphor of a sticky object illustrates not only the past work that made an arrival possible, but also the effects of that work on what it is that arrives. If we considered methods as sticky objects that pick up what they come into contact with, what are the implications this has for how philosophy relates to its methods, as well as its understanding of the history behind the appearance of its objects of study?

It will be useful to first deepen our understanding of what it means for a method to be a sticky object. One might, for instance, challenge attributing “stickiness” to methods. However, instead of thinking of stickiness as a property or feature of methods, we might consider Ahmed’s alternative account of stickiness “as an effect of surfacing, as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs… That is, stickiness depends on histories of contact that have already impressed upon the surface of the object.”65 As a result, we can understand the stickiness of methods in this alternative relational sense, such that “stickiness involves a form of relationality, or a ‘with-ness,’ in which the elements that are ‘with’ get bound together.”66 If

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64 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 40.


methods cohere *with* their objects of study—as we saw through the relation of being orientated toward versus around—then the stickiness of methods pertains to how they become “bound together” with their objects of study.

If this is the case, then the way in which methods emerge in this “sticky” relation with their objects of study cannot be considered to be merely a contingent feature; or, rather, it is a contingent feature, but this does not itself justify dismissing its significance. To do so would be to fail to take into account the ways in which such contingencies leave impressions, touching and marking method through this contact.\(^67\) The contingencies of method’s history stick to it as a consequence of its relationality with its objects of study and the context in which it cohered alongside them. It is important, however, to clarify that despite the stickiness of a method’s history, this does not entail the idea that method is itself “stuck” as a static or fixed object. While the impressions of contact remain, sticky objects, Ahmed argues, can still take on “new meanings, or new orientations to ‘old’ meanings.”\(^68\) She uses the term “queer” to demonstrate how it was “once a term of abuse…[but] has become a name for an alternative political orientation. Importantly, as a sticky sign, ‘queer’ acquires new meaning not by being cut off from its previous contexts of utterance, but by preserving them.”\(^69\) In other words, the impressions left by the contingencies of a method’s history do not disappear but are preserved as it acquires new meanings or new orientations to old meanings.

\(^{67}\) The terms “contingent” and “contact” are, in fact, etymologically linked, with *con* meaning “together” and *tag* as “to touch or handle.” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “contingent (adj.),” last modified March 16, 2018, https://www.etymonline.com/word/contingent.


While methods are not permanently fixed as a consequence of the stickiness of their histories, this does not mean that methods can take on just any meaning or be put to use for any purpose. What a method has previously come into contact with will influence and limit what is possible in the future for it to come into contact with. Ahmed describes this feature of sticky objects in terms of the tendencies that bodies acquire through “the repetitions of some actions over others,” such that “bodies come to ‘have’ certain orientations over time,” which inform the directions they will “tend toward.”

In elaborating on Judith Butler’s claim that a possibility is made possible through the foreclosure of other possibilities, Ahmed expands on this notion of foreclosure through explaining how the actions that bodies come to tend toward not only delineates a “field of positive action, of what this or that body does do, [but] also defines a field of inaction, of actions that are possible but that are not taken up, or even actions that are not possible because of what has been taken up. Such histories of action or ‘take up’ shape the bodily horizon of bodies.” Methods, in this sense, can be understood as having their own “horizons” that shape both what the activity of thinking comes to “take up” as well as how it will take it up. In particular, we can consider the actions of thought as delineating a field of thought, which also defines a field of the unthought, the not-yet-thought or even the non-thought. As a consequence of each action of thought, a field of the unthought emerges as that which is not possible to think because of the

70 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 58. We might consider a physical analogue of such tendencies in terms of the neuroscience of habit formation, according to which the repetition of a behavior results in increased interconnections between neurons, leading to the creation of neural pathways that enable the behavior to become automatic so that we come to tend toward such behaviors without conscious thought. See: Melissa Malvaez, “Neural substrates of habit,” *Journal of Neuroscience Research* 98, no. 6 (June 2020): 986-997.

71 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 58. The passage Ahmed quotes from Judith Butler is: “Heterosexual genders form themselves through the renunciation of the possibility of homosexuality, as a foreclosure which produces a field of heterosexual objects at the same time as it produces a domain of those whom it would be impossible to love.” *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 21.)
methodological orientations one has already taken. Method is an effect of the kind of work that thought does, work which in turn “directs” thought, thereby affecting what it can think. The assumption of a disinterested philosophical gaze that is oriented by method covers over the field of the unthought by denying the tendencies that thought acquires through the repeated actions of a particular methodological approach. If methods and objects of study are understood as existing in a mutually constitutive relation in which each shapes and informs the other, then the presumption of neutrality undermines the possibility of a method “listening” to its objects of study, so to speak. Method, in other words, is unable to critically reflect on the way in which it influences the formation of its objects of study, as well as the influence of the objects of study on the continual formation of a method.

Taking this constitutive relationship into consideration involves making explicit the history behind the givenness of that which thought takes as given. How the given became given as a result of the repetition of past actions means that the appearance of neutrality is not equivalent to the natural, insofar as the natural is understood as that which arises or comes about without effort. While the neutral appears effortless in the moment, it is, in fact, the result of prior work, of repeated actions that have “prepared the ground,” making the effortlessness of future actions possible through the formation of tendencies that direct one toward some “things” rather than others. As a result, the history of methods, here understood as the repetition of the activity of thinking, as well as the contingencies in method’s emergence through its positional relation with its objects of study—contingencies that leave their impressions like contact with a sticky object—calls for philosophy to have a critical relation to its methodological orientation, to not assume that methods offer it an impartial, disinterested view from which philosophical inquiry proceeds. Moreover, as a sticky object, a method’s history is not a static, finished story but
remains open to the possibility of taking on new meanings, which will open up new fields of positive action, as well as create fields of negative action that become defined as a consequence of a method’s history of contact and its dynamic relationality with the objects of study.

**Perceiving Method**

In order to further develop our understanding of the spatial and temporal features of method, I turn in the following sections to Alia Al-Saji’s phenomenological analysis of hesitation, which she presents as “a corrective” to the “reifying structures of racializing perception and affect.” By attending to its affective dimensions, the overall aim of Al-Saji’s argument is to “interrupt the totalizing sense of completeness” that characterizes racializing vision as a consequence of the closure of receptivity, which suppresses vision’s “ability to be affected, to be touched, by that which lies beyond or beneath its habitual objectifying schemas.” Al-Saji develops her analysis of racializing vision by drawing on Frantz Fanon’s account of racialization as “a socially pathological othering,” in which “difference no longer appears to be relational or fluid; difference is made into opposition and hierarchy.” This hierarchical structure is naturalized and “seen as a feature of the world” through “the way in which race is perceived as belonging to visible features of the body (such as skin color).” In addition to the naturalization processes, Al-Saji also highlights Fanon’s account of the rationalization of racism as it “takes itself to originate as a mere reaction to the racialized other”

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73 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 147, 140.


and not as a “social, cultural and historical construct.” Racialization, in other words, operates through projecting oppositional difference onto the perceived body, naturalizing the hierarchical structures of racism that are then sustained by processes of rationalization, all of which conceal the “racializing mechanisms and misconstrues its objects.” Based on this understanding of Fanon’s account of racialization, Al-Saji highlights the role of visual perception in the naturalization of “the racialization of bodies and the rationalization of racism.” She then uses this as a focal point for developing a phenomenological account of how “the structure of vision allows it to become racializing,” identifying “what is distinctive about [racializing vision]” through interrogating both its “recalcitrance and rigidity,” as well as its “contextualism and contingency,” as a “means for criticizing and transforming” it.

Before turning to considerations of method in relation to Al-Saji’s analysis, it will be useful to briefly demonstrate how the naturalizing processes of racializing vision operate through what Al-Saji refers to as the immediacy of racializing affect. She illustrates such affective immediacy by recalling a news story from France during the time when the country was debating—and, in 2004, passed into law—banning girls from wearing headscarves in public schools. The news story relates an incident in which a teacher expressed her repulsion at a Muslim student wearing a headscarf. The teacher’s reaction, according to Al-Saji, illustrates how “the mechanism of othering by which racializing perception inscribes its cause in the racialized

76 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 138.

77 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 137. Al-Saji also notes the role of forgetting in Fanon’s account of racism, according to which, “it is of the essence of racism to forget the histories and operations of power, which constitute it, and to scapegoat or blame its victims” (137).

78 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 137.

body proceeds here at the prereflective level.” As a consequence of perception and affect operating at this prereflective level, Al-Saji argues that the immediacy of racializing affect “seems to justify the teacher’s response,” since her racist reaction “takes the form of a quasi-automatic, bodily and affective reaction to the appearance of the girl’s body.” This makes it possible for the teacher’s reaction to be “read as itself a ‘natural’ reaction to the way things are (rather than as a culturally, socially, and historically constituted comportment).” In other words, the prereflective level at which racializing perception operates contributes to its apparent immediacy as a “quasi-automatic” and “bodily” reaction, features that facilitate the naturalization of the affective response, justifying it as “natural.” By inscribing the cause of the response to the racialized body—as opposed to seeing it as culturally, socially and historically mediated—racializing perception insulates itself from the kind of critical reflection that would be able to call into question the naturalization of racializing affect.

Given this outline of Al-Saji’s notion of racializing vision, we can begin to consider how her account relates to our own analysis of method. While the ultimate aim of the comparison between method and racializing vision is to draw out its spatial and temporal dimensions, it is useful to first justify the comparison, since one might reasonably ask what racializing vision has to do with method. With regards to the perception component of racializing vision, method could be understood as a way of perceiving the world, using “perceive” in the broader sense of “apprehend,” which gets closer to its etymological meaning of “to obtain,” “grasp,” or “take hold

80 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 140.
81 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 140.
82 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 140.
of." Rather than grasping with one’s hands, we also perceive by grasping with the mind in order to apprehend—or, rather, comprehend—an idea. Method in this sense is a structured way of perceiving, a notion consistent with our earlier account of method as an orientation that instructs me which way to turn in order to get my bearings such that I can comprehend that which I face in being so directed.

Beyond this connection between method and perception, one might still have reservations with the comparison to the affective features of racializing vision. What does method have to do with affect? A phenomenological analysis of method, understood as a way of perceiving, introduces affect based on its relation to perception. Al-Saji describes the relation between perception and affect as forming “two sides of the same phenomenon, linking that which is seen as racialized to its immediately felt effects on the racializing body.” Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s account of vision in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Al-Saji’s analysis is based on the notion that “we learn to see,” which means that “vision is not a mere neutral recording of the visible,” but rather, vision “makes visible [and] it does so differentially according to sedimented habits of seeing—according to the tacit ways our bodies relate to and move in the world, allowing certain aspects of that world to be foregrounded.”

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84 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 140. Al-Saji notes that this link between perception and affect “recalls Merleau-Ponty’s account of operative intentionality as dialogue of body and world (in *Phenomenology of Perception*)—perception being an intentional response to the call of the world in a prior moment. This dialogue is distorted in racialization, but it is not suspended. In other words, racialization is not simply projective, but constitutes its own affects, as if it were reacting to the world” (165-166n31).

Al-Saji uses the term “affect” in a broadly phenomenological sense, according to which “affectivity is wider than what can be called emotion,” insofar as emotion is understood as “an intentional, sense-giving relation (to an object),” whereas affect is “the preintentional tendency or force (attraction, repulsion, pain, pleasure, etc.) that can motivate and support this intentional turning toward an object.”

For Al-Saji, affectivity relates to and includes the dimensions of the world—“material, diacritical, historical or social”—that “work in us and affect us, invisibly and unconsciously, allowing us to see, [but] it is by means of their elision that the realm of visible objectivity is defined.”

Affect and vision are therefore linked insofar as affectivity and the invisible dimensions that inform our sedimented ways of seeing are the condition for the visible. Accordingly, if method is understood as a way of perceiving that foregrounds certain aspects of the world, enabling one to perceive the intended objects of study, and perception is linked to affectivity insofar as we learn to perceive, then we need to inquire into the affective dimensions of method.

There are two final points I wish to clarify before turning to the comparative analysis. First, a distinction should be drawn between the affective dimensions of method and the concept of affective methodology. The latter is a term developed by Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage in the context of cultural analysis that refers to methodological strategies used by researchers for investigating “affective processes in relation to a certain empirical study,” in

86 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 162n2.


88 This conception of method, as a way of perceiving that foregrounds certain aspects of the world, relates to Romanyshyn’s characterization of method as “a way of making some things count while discounting other things. Method is a perspective that both reveals a topic and conceals it.” *The Wounded Researcher*, 212.
order to more directly “engage with the immaterial and affective processes of social life.”

Affective methodology, in this case, is the use of method in the service of empirical research on affect. What I propose to explore, in contrast, are the affective features of method as such. We find, for instance, brief allusions to the affectivity of method in our earlier discussion on Ahmed, such as in her description of orientations as the ground “into which we sink our feet,” gesturing at a sense of the comfort and pleasant stability that a method offers. In order to expand on the affective features of method, I seek to identify, based on Al-Saji’s broader definition of affect, the preintentional tendencies or forces that motivate the intentional “turning toward” certain objects of study, under the “guidance” of a method as it directs thought, in order to inform how philosophy relates to method in a way that is grounded in its spatial and temporal dimensions.

The second issue concerns the use of racializing vision for this comparison with method. One might call into question the legitimacy of drawing conclusions about method based on the particular case of racializing vision. In other words, why is the racializing form of vision an appropriate basis from which to extrapolate claims about method? Why not other, perhaps more “innocuous” ways of perceiving? The particular concern raised by such an objection is whether the comparison with racializing vision would build in assumptions up front about method that would skew the analysis. One might respond, on one hand, by noting that every comparison, in one sense or another, includes assumptions about the nature of that which is being compared. If this were not the case, comparisons would be more or less arbitrary and, as a consequence,

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unlikely to be very informative.\textsuperscript{90} Using other, perhaps less contentious forms of perception for the purposes of comparison would also build in assumptions that would shape the analysis of method. However, by using a case like racializing vision, in which the affective import is heightened and acute, the affective structures are not only more pronounced, but also serve a cautionary function: by using what might be considered an “extreme” case of perceiving—although, given the pervasiveness of racializing vision and its many subtle forms, it is extreme not in terms of frequency or conspicuity but in its resistance to emendation—it becomes possible to identify similar cases with regards to method. Accordingly, a component that has thus far been implicit in the analysis of method, but which will emerge more explicitly in the following sections, will be identifying forms of what might be considered “methodological perceiving” that are analogous to racializing vision and how such cases inform our understanding of philosophy’s relation to method.

\textbf{Affective Rigidity and Temporal Overdetermination}

One of the ways Al-Saji explores the closure of receptivity in her analysis of racializing vision is in terms of the particular temporal structure that leads to the “\textit{rigidity} of racializing affect.”\textsuperscript{91} She begins by comparing this affective rigidity to Fanon’s notion of “affective ankylosis,” which he describes as an inability to make the past \textit{fluid}.\textsuperscript{92} The rigidity of affect in

\textsuperscript{90} See: Ralph Weber, “‘How to Compare?’ – On the Methodological State of Comparative Philosophy,” \textit{Philosophy Compass} 8, no. 7 (2013): 593-603. While Weber is specifically concerned with the subfield of comparative philosophy, there is more general discussion on methodology and the nature of comparisons.

\textsuperscript{91} Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 141.

\textsuperscript{92} Franz Fanon, \textit{Peau Noire Masques Blancs} (Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 98. This is my own translation of the passage, which appears in the original text as: “Cette impossibilité pour l’autre de liquider une fois pour toutes le passé” (98). Al-Saji uses Charles Lam Markmann’s translation as the “inability to liquidate the past” (121), which is superior, in my opinion, to Richard Philcox’s more literal translation: “the impossibility on either side to obliterate the past once and for all” (101). However, given the language of frozen, ossified, fused, stiffening and rigidity that Al-Saji uses in the context of her analysis, the connotation of fluidity seemed more appropriate. See: Charles Lam
racializing vision derives from a similar inability that makes it “not only frozen in its response but repetitive in its form.” Al-Saji argues that Fanon’s use of the medical term “ankylosis,” which is primarily used to describe the fusion of bones leading to the stiffening and immobility of joints, “should be read in medical, anatomical and metaphorical senses at once.” Like the immobility of the fused joints, affective ankylosis “diagnoses a past that coalesces and adheres, repeatedly over time, but that may also numb, inflame, or become gangrenous” as a consequence of this ossified past, leaving it “fused and immovable,” unable “to be reconfigured, to be rearticulated, or felt differently.” The rigidity of racializing affect is a result of such repetition, whereby the past is “congealed as schema and is, as such, overdetermined and fixed in its sense.” Corresponding to this overdetermination of the past is a predetermination of the future, since the “ossified schemas of the past” are “repeated in the present,” which “closes down the future” so that it is no longer “the open setting where newness can be created.” The rigidity of racializing affect is therefore, in part, a result of this closed temporality that makes it receptive to only “that which is determined in advance.”

With regards to method, we can apply Al-Saji’s account of temporal overdetermination and affective rigidity to consider methodological frameworks in which the past is similarly


93 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 141.

94 Al-Saji, “Too Late: Fanon, the dismembered past, and a phenomenology of racialized time,” in *Fanon, Phenomenology and Psychology*, ed. Leswin Laubscher, Derek Hook, and Miraj Desai (Routledge, 2021), 186.

95 Al-Saji, “Too Late,” 187.

96 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 141.

97 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 141-142.

98 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 142.
“congealed as schema” and frozen in its meaning, thereby producing a kind of ankylosis that shapes both what thought perceives in the present and predetermines what it expects to perceive in the future.99 Social contract theory offers a useful—though, like all examples, imperfect—case with which to illustrate the mechanisms through which the temporal overdetermination of a methodological framework contributes to an affective rigidity that “closes down the future” such that it is no longer “the open setting where newness can be created.”100 In classical social contract theory, the past is schematized as a pre-political and pre-social “state of nature,” in which human beings are depicted as originally asocial, atomistic individuals who are primarily occupied with defending and protecting what is theirs against all others. This is, as Hobbes describes, a constant state of war, which drives individuals to rationally consent to surrendering their absolute freedom in exchange for the security of living under the political authority of the state.101

While philosophers have advanced critiques of this theorized past—whether actual or hypothetical—and its intended function of explaining the emergence and legitimacy of political authority, the general idea of a social contract continues to have an influence in shaping contemporary discourse, beyond the sphere of academia, on the relation between society and the state. This is demonstrated in an anthropological study by Gwen Burnyeat and Miranda Johansson on the idea of the social contract, which, they argue, “clearly abounds in popular,

99 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 141.

100 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 141. It is important to qualify the use of examples, especially in this context. Just as every comparison entails its own presuppositions about the entities being compared, (q.v. n.90 above), the use of examples to illustrate a point also includes its own set of assumptions about the nature of the example, in part due to the demands of concision that ultimately reduces the complexity of the example used.

academic, and political imaginaries,” through what they refer to as “contractarian thinking.” Such thinking persists despite critiques among some political philosophers who contend that the concept has “perhaps outlived its usefulness.” They cite examples in which recent concerns over social unrest and global crises come to be expressed in terms of the language of a social contract, using the notion of “broken contracts” in order to “[call] for new or repaired ones.” However, unlike debates within a philosophical context, discussion of a social contract in contemporary, non-academic usage tends to be “broad brush and vague,” making it a “convenient vessel” that can be “strategically deployed by governments, international organizations, scholars and activists to conjure a sense of a relationship rooted in legitimacy through consent, yet which often simultaneously enables an occlusion of the reality of state-society relations.” Thus, whether or not the Hobbesian state of nature offers—or was intended to offer—an accurate historical account of the emergence of the political state, the schema it and other contractarian accounts present continues to influence the way the legitimacy of political authority and its relation to society comes to be perceived.

In particular, the idea of a chaotic and dangerous pre-political past, which is used to explain and legitimize the existence of state authority within social contract theory, also operates as a means for maintaining and reproducing the general framework of contractual relations. As a consequence, responses to present and future crises are expressed as demands to fix or repair the contract between society and the state, as opposed to a more radical critique that calls into


question the framework of the social contract itself. Through their anthropological study of the idea of the social contract, Burnyeat and Johansson pursue such a reframing, asking how the social contract, as an idea, has been socially constructed, arguing that such an analysis would reveal, among other things, how “contractarian thinking” is used “as a potentially oppressive technology of governance.”\textsuperscript{106} The past, as constructed within social contract theory, can be used to repeat the contractual relation in the present and project it onto the future, rendering the contract as the form through which all relations become filtered. Carole Pateman raises a similar critique, arguing that according to contractarianism, “social life and relationships not only originate from a social contract but, properly, are seen as an endless series of discrete contracts.”\textsuperscript{107} The social world, as Pateman argues, is essentially “contracts all the way down,” with all social relations taking on the form of the contractual relation, leading to the overdetermination of the form such that “no limits can be placed on contract and contractual relations; even the ultimate form of civil subordination, the slave contract, is legitimate.”\textsuperscript{108}

Through this example of the social contract, we can see the way in which a methodological framework can become temporally overdetermined through a reductive schema of contractual relations that, as Burnyeat and Johansson argue, “mobilizes the concept as an apparently apolitical framework that resonates as ‘natural’, yet it both obscures and creates political relations.”\textsuperscript{109} Thus, like the naturalizing effect of affective immediacy and the rigidity of affective ankylosis in Al-Saji’s account of racializing vision, the methodological framework of


\textsuperscript{108} Pateman, \textit{The Sexual Contract}, 15.

the social contract naturalizes the contractual relation between society and the state, while also overdetermining political relations and, as a consequence, repeats the ossified schemas of the past in the present.

Beyond the temporal overdetermination of racializing vision, Al-Saji also attributes the rigidity of racializing affect to its “totalizing sense of completeness.”\textsuperscript{110} The ankylosis of racializing affect is here understood in terms of its “lack of fluidity or becoming,” such that “it does not hesitate in its course and does not become otherwise.”\textsuperscript{111} In describing this “totalizing sense of completeness,” in which, for racializing affect, “\textit{all is given},” Al-Saji draws on Shannon Sullivan’s account of the habits of white privilege and, in particular, her characterization of such habits as being “ontologically expansive.”\textsuperscript{112} Similar to the way in which white privilege entails a sense of being entitled to occupy any and all spaces, racializing affect likewise “projects and narcissistically perpetuates itself in all contexts and times, expecting to encounter confirmations of itself there.”\textsuperscript{113} However, in contrast to Sullivan’s account, in which such habits are sustained by “the unobstructed and expansive ‘I can’ of white privilege,” the expansiveness of racializing affect is also “based on a structural closure, an ‘I cannot see or feel otherwise.’”\textsuperscript{114} It is, in other

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 142.
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 142.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 144.
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 144.
  \item \textsuperscript{114} Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 145. In a footnote, Al-Saji expands on how her use of ontological expansiveness diverges from Sullivan’s description of white privilege. For Sullivan, “the unobstructed and expansive ‘I can’ of white privilege,” is based on a “repressive forgetting” that enables a sense of being “entitled to all spaces and that does not hesitate to occupy them” (Al-Saji, 165n30). While Al-Saji agrees with Sullivan that “repressive forgetting plays a role in maintaining habits of white privilege,” there is an additional, “internal and structural flaw, an ‘I cannot’ that limits their receptivity and ability to hesitate and change” (Al-Saji, 165n30). It is this structural limitation that Al-Saji sees as also playing a role in Sullivan’s concept of ontological expansiveness that leads her to find resonances between her account of racializing affect and Sullivan’s descriptions of white privilege.
\end{itemize}
words, an expansiveness that stems from a limitation, an internal incapacity of receptivity that causes racializing affect to be especially recalcitrant to change. Like the way in which the temporal overdetermination of the past contributes to the predetermination of the future, the structural limitation of the “ontological expansiveness” of racializing affect similarly preconfigures affectivity such that “the all which is given has been circumscribed in advance according to racializing schemas.”

Based on Al-Saji’s description of the temporal overdetermination and affective rigidity that characterizes racializing vision, we can perhaps imagine a similar case in the context of method in terms of what could be considered “methodological dogmatism,” in which an unquestioned commitment to a particular methodological framework—a kind of methodological fidelity that persists dogmatically—would be characterized by a similar “lack of fluidity” that “does not become otherwise.” Methodological dogmatism fixes the meaning of its objects of study, ossifying the meaning of what has already been thought and, as a consequence, risks becoming “ontologically expansive” by assuming that a single methodological orientation is the only thing that thought requires to think all which is given to it, giving rise to a closed methodological framework that continually finds confirmations of itself. In other words, the expansiveness of methodological dogmatism is based on the structural closure of a method that circumscribes in advance what can be thought, predetermining what thought will expect to find by ossifying the methodological framework based on what thought has already found. It thus predetermines the future in terms of what it expects to find, such that “the future is not the open setting where newness can be created; its possibilities are projected and mapped in advance

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115 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 144.
116 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 142.
based on ossified schemas of the past.”

By circumscribing the receptivity of thinking to only “that which is determined in advance,” according to a particular methodological framework, the horizon of what can be thought becomes closed.

One of the mechanisms through which methodological schemas become ossified can be understood by recalling our earlier discussion of Ahmed’s distinction between orientated around versus orientated toward. As noted, both aspects of being orientated exist in a mutually constitutive relation. In our analysis of method as that which orients thinking, I argued that method and its objects of study also mutually constitute each other. Accordingly, we can understand the structural closure that characterizes the affective rigidity of what I’ve referred to as methodological dogmatism as a failure to take the constitutive relation between method and objects of study into consideration. As a consequence, the rigidity further prevents the reflexive moment of turning back and critically reflecting on the center around which one is orientated by a method, thereby fixing the meaning of the objects of study and covering over the ways in which their meaning is mediated by the material, historical and social conditions that make comprehensible that which is comprehended.

Affective Ambiguity and Univocal/Reactive Directionality

The material, historical and social dimensions that mediate the visible are further masked, according to Al-Saji, due to the univocal and reactive directionality of racializing affect which reduces the ambiguity of affectivity and, as a consequence, inhibits the receptivity of racializing vision, undermining one’s capacity for critical, reflexive self-awareness. Al-Saji’s analysis of

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117 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 141.

118 I am drawing a parallel here with Al-Saji’s claim that “vision not only makes visible, it does so differentially according to sedimented habits of seeing” (“A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 138).
these features of racializing affect is informed by the accounts of affect found in both Henri Bergson and Merleau-Ponty. From Bergson, Al-Saji draws on his understanding of affect as a “self Relation or self-perception—the body’s effort on itself in response to [its] situation.”\textsuperscript{119} This effort, however, is “a peculiar kind,” insofar as affect is “a situated response to the context in which the body finds itself, but it is not a response that acts on that situation directly. Rather, affect is an effort to stave off habitual reaction by prefiguring it as bodily feeling.”\textsuperscript{120} In other words, “affect responds to its context by working on itself,” which requires that it remain open and receptive to that which is other, as well as a “lived-through and self-aware undergoing of that alterity.”\textsuperscript{121} It is in this sense that Al-Saji describes affect as representing “the intersection of self-affection and hetero-affection.”\textsuperscript{122}

The ambiguity of affect in part derives from this intersection of self and other, “an encounter mediated by forces of sociality and historicity, by structures of domination and privilege, which themselves remain invisible.”\textsuperscript{123} In racializing affect, this ambiguity is reduced when “that which is felt in affect is projected onto the other as cause, hiding both self-involvement and structural conditions.”\textsuperscript{124} By concealing its involvement and failing to work on itself as a “lived-through bodily awareness” in response to the other, racializing affect becomes closed off to engaging in a critical awareness that would potentially enable one to grasp the ways

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{119}] Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 145.
\item[\textsuperscript{120}] Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 145-146.
\item[\textsuperscript{121}] Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 146.
\item[\textsuperscript{122}] Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 148.
\item[\textsuperscript{123}] Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 148.
\item[\textsuperscript{124}] Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 148.
\end{itemize}
in which their affective experience is structured and informed by social, cultural, historical and habitual forces.\textsuperscript{125} Without the ambiguity of self-affection and hetero-affection, racializing affect is “reduced to, and naturalized as, a univocal and reactive directionality.”\textsuperscript{126} This sense of ambiguity is based on a distinction Merleau-Ponty draws between ambiguity and ambivalence, where he defines the former in terms of its ability to “accept a multiplicity of perspectives, whereas ambivalence hides contradictions and imposes a univocal perspective.”\textsuperscript{127} What is lost by reducing affective ambiguity to ambivalence is not just the capacity to incorporate a multiplicity of potentially contradictory perspectives, but also the ability for affect to be able to “turn back onto the feeling, perceiving, social subject as its source.”\textsuperscript{128}

There are again similarities here between Al-Saji’s account of affective ambiguity and Ahmed’s distinction between being orientated around versus toward. In particular, we can understand the reactive directionality of racializing vision as a closure of receptivity due to a failure to account for the dialectical relation between these two aspects of being orientated, leaving only the “effect” of perception without the appearance of its internal “cause,” or an awareness of the mutually constitutive relation that drives this dynamic interrelation. Applying this sense of the reactive directionality of racializing vision to Ahmed’s example of the formation of the Orient and the Occident, we can see how the Occident conceals itself as the center, causing the Orient to appear as if it were an independent entity and not the effect of the

\textsuperscript{125} Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 146.

\textsuperscript{126} Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 148


\textsuperscript{128} Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 148.
objectifying “gaze” of the Occident. In this case, the Occident is unable to take account of itself as participating in the creation of itself as the center and, consequently, its role in the formation of the Orient as that toward which it faces, i.e., as the object of perception. With regards to method, the failure to account for and critically reflect on both its own self-involvement in the construction of the meaning of its objects of study, as well as the structural conditions that mediate their interrelation, results in a reactive, univocal conception of method. In order to avoid such a relation to method, philosophy’s methodological approaches can incorporate the critical reflexivity that would enable it to take itself into account as participating in the foregrounding of its objects of study, as well as the structural conditions that mediate their meaning.

There are two interrelated aspects to highlight here in terms of our analysis of method. First, in terms of the mutually constitutive relation between method and its objects of study, the problem of methodological dogmatism emerges, in part, as a result of diminishing, neglecting or outright rejecting the dialectical nature of this relation. Just as racializing vision ascribes the cause of what is felt in affect to the racialized other, method can likewise ascribe the cause of the appearance of its objects of study to the objects themselves, thereby failing to take account of its own role in the formation of that which it directs one’s attention toward. Second, not only could method fail to reflexively take itself into account when considering the emergence of its objects of study, such a reduction in ambiguity, using Merleau-Ponty’s distinction, also suggests that method would also hide its own “self-involvement” and structural conditions. In other words, the structural closure that impedes acknowledging the self-involvement required for critical reflexivity, also covers over the material, historical and social conditions that informed and gave shape to the methodological framework itself. By covering over and concealing such conditions of its own emergence and formation, methodological dogmatism can be understood as rejecting a
multiplicity of perspectives—especially contradictory perspectives—reducing the ambiguity of thinking by limiting it to a single methodological framework that directs thought to only those coherent objects of study that are consistent with what has already been thought. This loss in the ambiguity of thinking that results from a closure in the dialectical relation of method and object of study suggests a methodological orientation that is unable to turn back onto itself similar to how racializing affect hides self-affection and the structural conditions that mediate the encounter with hetero-affection. Method, in other words, is eliminated from the equation as an element that is still becoming in its relation with its objects of study.

**A Praxis of Hesitant-Disorientation**

By understanding method as both a way of being orientated as well as a way of perceiving, we were able to identify various temporal and spatial dimensions of method through Ahmed and Al-Saji’s phenomenological analyses. Temporally, we saw how methods have their own histories that speak to the social, political, material and embodied conditions that give shape to methods as they come to be constituted in relation to their objects of study. These histories, however, can be forgotten, falling into the background as a consequence of what Ahmed describes as the “magic of arrival,” which conceals the prior work required to arrive as well as the social investment and commitment to that work. When a method’s history falls into the background, giving it the appearance of neutrality, there is the risk of naturalizing a methodological framework and closing its horizon such that “the future is not the open setting where newness can be created; its possibilities are projected and mapped in advance based on ossified schemas of the past.”

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129 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 141.
emergence that belies this appearance of neutrality, there is a need to bring its history back into
the foreground to make the temporality of methods reappear.

With regards to the spatial dimensions of methods, Ahmed’s distinction between being
orientated around versus orientated toward highlighted not just the dialectical relation between
methods and their objects of study, but also the particular position that every methodological
orientation presupposes as the position from which one becomes orientated toward certain
objects. A method’s position, however, does not explicitly appear within a method’s “perceptual
field” since its position is what makes the appearance of that which one faces possible. In other
words, a method’s position—and the historical, social, political and material conditions that
influence the constitution of its position—can only be indirectly apprehended as it is the very
condition that shapes and informs that which is apprehended, i.e., a method’s objects of study.
Furthermore, through understanding methods as sticky objects that “pick up” that which they
have come into contact with, the histories of methods influence how thought becomes orientated.
The contingencies of what a method has come into contact with leave “impressions” that inform
what it will tend toward—and thus come into contact with—in the future. Accordingly, the
history of contact that sticks to a method comes to delineate a “field of positive action,”
determining what becomes possible for thought to think as a consequence of its methodological
orientation, as well as a “field of inaction” that designates what is no longer possible for thought
to think, the unthinkable or even the non-thought.\textsuperscript{130} The stickiness of methods thus calls
attention to their tendencies, that methods orient thought toward some things more than others,
influencing what one expects to come into contact with in the future and the meaning of that
which one expects to encounter.

\textsuperscript{130} Ahmed, \textit{Queer Phenomenology}, 58.
An element that has become apparent through this analysis of the spatial and temporal dimensions of methods is the existence of certain pitfalls or risks that emerge as a consequence of failing to appreciate the complex relationality of methods. It became clear, for instance, that the dialectical relation between methods and their objects of study calls for a critical reflexivity in which methods reflect back on themselves, incorporating their self-involvement and the social, historical and material conditions that constitute the orientation of a methodological framework. Without such reflexivity, methods risk becoming static, fixed structures that orient thought through ossified schemas that overdetermine the past and predetermine the future. A crucial component of incorporating reflexivity into a methodological orientation is bringing a method’s history to the foreground, making explicit the mutually constitutive relation in which methods and their objects of study co-constitute each other.

A pertinent question, therefore, is how to relate to method so as to avoid this static notion of method and its more extreme manifestations, such as methodological dogmatism. In the final section of this analysis, I respond to this issue by exploring how Ahmed and Al-Saji respond to the problems they identify in their analyses of orientations and racializing vision through their notions of disorientation and hesitation, respectively. While the contexts in which disorientation and hesitation are presented differ in certain ways, they can both be understood as similarly seeking an effect of unsettling or disrupting that which has accumulated, breaking through the ossified schemas and naturalized compulsory orientations, creating the space for movement that makes it possible to be orientated differently, to perceived otherwise. To explore the possibility of achieving a similar effect for method, I briefly outline Ahmed’s concept of disorientation and Al-Saji’s account of hesitation in order to consider how something like a praxis of hesitant-disorientation could inform philosophy’s relation to method.
As discussed above, one of the ways orientations work is by providing a stable ground into which we can “sink our feet,” becoming orientated through the familiarity of that which one faces from the comfort of home, so to speak.\textsuperscript{131} This ground, however, is not neutral since it “gives ground to some more than others.”\textsuperscript{132} The failure to sink into the ground is disorientating and, for some, a painful reminder of their deviation from the norm of the dominant orientation.\textsuperscript{133} While such instances of disorientation can be detrimental for those that deviate, for those who occupy the center it is vital.\textsuperscript{134} The significance of disorientation derives from its capacity to make visible the center around which one is orientated, to disturb the givenness of the ground, “which also disturbs what gathers ‘on’ the ground.”\textsuperscript{135} The neutrality of the ground is belied by the disturbance in which its givenness is no longer given, a loss of that which was familiar but also a gain: “to make that ‘familiar’ strange, or even to allow that which has been overlooked—which has been treated as furniture—to dance with renewed life.”\textsuperscript{136} The loss of ground, in other words, also creates space for movement and the possibility of a new ground by making apparent “how objects are gathered to create a ground.”\textsuperscript{137}

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\textsuperscript{131} Ahmed, \textit{Queer Phenomenology}, 160.

\textsuperscript{132} Ahmed, \textit{Queer Phenomenology}, 160.

\textsuperscript{133} For instance, Ahmed refers to Fanon’s descriptions of experiencing anti-Black racism as being “about the experience of disorientation, as the experience of being an object among other objects, of being shattered, of being cut into pieces by the hostility of the white gaze. Disorientation can be a bodily feeling of losing one’s place, and an effect of the loss of a place: it can be a violent feeling, and a feeling that is affected by violence, or shaped by violence directed toward the body.” \textit{Queer Phenomenology}, 160.

\textsuperscript{134} Ahmed, \textit{Queer Phenomenology}, 157.

\textsuperscript{135} Ahmed, \textit{Queer Phenomenology}, 160.

\textsuperscript{136} Ahmed, \textit{Queer Phenomenology}, 177.

\textsuperscript{137} Ahmed, \textit{Queer Phenomenology}, 160.
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There are a few significant points I wish to highlight from this brief outline of disorientation with regards to method and philosophy’s relation to it. First, what causes the ground to be disturbed is not a successful orientation. The ground is disturbed by the failure to be orientated. With regards to method, one implication is that incorporating a critical reflexivity into how philosophy relates to method might not be enough, since what it would be striving to achieve is a successfully critical and successfully reflexive relation to method. Such a direct approach would ultimately leave the very ground of a method’s orientation undisturbed by allowing the “objects” that have gathered there, i.e., what it means to be critical and reflexive, in place and given. Furthermore, given the invisibility of the ground of our methods that orientate our thinking, what would it mean to have a critical self-reflexive stance towards that which has disappeared from view? Rather than directly incorporating a critical reflexivity into philosophy’s relation to method, it can be indirectly achieved by calling attention to the moments when methods fail to orientate. It is through what might be called methodological failure that the givenness of what has gathered on the ground can be made explicit, allowing the familiar objects of thought to appear strange and thus able to move around and take on new meaning. The failure of a method to orientate thought reveals the ground of the method, a revealing that disturbs that which is no longer seen as having gathered. To disturb through failure neither begins with nor depends on seeing or making appear that which is concealed. Such failure makes things appear, enabling one to see the unexpected, the uncanny, and the anomalous. The failures of our methods are the moments in which the curtain is pulled back, allowing us to see the behind-the-scenes activity of cohering, shaping and orientating. A praxis of disorientation calls on philosophers to pay attention to the moments when methods fail to cohere, order and arrange the objects that have gathered.
Moreover, if the objects that have gathered on the ground are those that one expects to encounter, then disturbing the ground and thus the objects that have gathered on it, makes it possible for not only the unexpected to come into view, but also to see the expected in a new light, to see the familiar as strange. A method that comes into contact with its objects of study “as things that have been arranged in specific ways,” will thereby disturb the ground on which the method orientates our thinking by beginning “with the strangeness of familiar objects.”

When we experience those familiar objects as strange, seeing them as if for the first time, such an encounter “allows the object to breathe not through a forgetting of its history but by allowing this history to come alive…not to lose sight of their history but to refuse to make them history by losing sight.” As the familiar becomes strange, the history of how the familiar became familiar no longer remains passively in the background. Disorientation keeps alive a method’s history by foregrounding it in moments of methodological failure.

With regards to racializing vision, Al-Saji argues that one must address the affective rigidity that results in the closure of receptivity in order to transform racializing vision. In drawing on Bergson’s account of duration, Al-Saji demonstrates how hesitation, as that which “defines the structure of time…the ontological interval wherein time…acts in experience,” is able to interrupt racializing affect’s totalizing sense of completeness by destabilizing its temporal overdetermination and univocal/reactive directionality. Affective hesitation achieves this interruption “not by eliminating affect but by modulating and transforming its temporality.”

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139 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 164.
140 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 142.
141 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 147.
For Bergson, “time is what hinders everything from being given at once.”\textsuperscript{142} Accordingly, in contrast to the closure of receptivity in racializing vision that is characterized by a totalizing sense of completeness, the temporal interval of hesitation means that for hesitating affect, “\textit{not all is given}…[and] it can become otherwise—opening onto other affective tendencies and perceptions.”\textsuperscript{143} Hesitation, moreover, is closely linked with affect since, according to Bergson, “affect is felt when the body hesitates in the course of its habitual action,” and, as a consequence, not only delays habitual action but also makes the delayed action “visible as an anticipated future among others in the world…Affective hesitation can thus make felt the historicity, contingency, and sedimentation of habitual actions and perceptions, as well as their plasticity.”\textsuperscript{144}

Al-Saji outlines the various ways that hesitation “reconfigures affect” so that it can become responsive and open, breaking through the rigidity of racializing affect.\textsuperscript{145} First, hesitation counteracts the immediacy of affect through a slowing down that makes the temporal interval of affect felt. Once affect’s automaticity is put into question, racializing affect’s “immediacy no longer stands in for its ‘naturalness’” and so is able to be denaturalized.\textsuperscript{146} By modulating the temporality of affect, hesitation enables affective experience to continue, “but with a different quality or intensity,” such that the structures of affectivity are disclosed, which include not only the social, cultural, historical and habitual forces that mediate affect, but also the ambiguity of affect as the intersection of self-affection and hetero-affection. Hesitation thus


\textsuperscript{143} Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 144-145.

\textsuperscript{144} Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 143.

\textsuperscript{145} Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 147.

\textsuperscript{146} Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 147.
restores the ambiguity of affect by revealing self-involvement as a lived-through bodily awareness. As ambiguous, affect “is unfrozen, able to become otherwise,” and open to a future that is not predetermined and a past that is not ossified but “that can be dynamically transformed through the passage of events.”147 Affectivity, as Al-Saji explains, “becomes a tentative search,” one in which affect is made to wait, thereby making the incompleteness of both affect and that to which affect responds felt in experience.148

With regards to method, I argued above that instances of methodological failure could bring about moments of disorientation, which can create space for a critical reflexivity that brings a method’s history to the foreground. There are, however, certain risks to the experience of disorientation that Ahmed notes in terms of their potential to give rise to a defensiveness, responding to the discomfort that results from the loss of ground by seeking a stable “place to reground and reorientate their relation to the world.”149 Such a response to disorientation could undermine the disruptive aims of methodological failure as one seeks the stability of a methodological orientation through reverting back to and reaffirming those familiar methodological centers that diminish the discomfort of disorientation. Such reactive responses to disorientation can be attenuated through incorporating Al-Saji’s notion of hesitation and the phenomenological opening that it creates. The reactivity of conservative affective responses to disorientation reveal a similar structure to the rigidity of racializing vision. Both fail to turn back on the mediating forces of sociality, historicity and habit that inform method, as well as its self-involvement in the constitution of its objects of study. In seeking the comfort of a stable


149 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 158.
methodological ground and the habits of thinking that remain in the background, conservative responses to the disorientation of methodological failures are based on an affective closure similar to that of racializing vision.

Hesitation suspends this reactivity, interposing a temporal interval that opens up the affective closure of conservative responses, creating the space needed to resist the urge for the comfort of a methodological ground. Hesitation makes the habits of thought and the historicity of methods visible, enabling disorientation to realize its more radical aims, keeping alive a method’s history by bringing the mediating forces to the foreground. The opening created by hesitation, if held open, allows for the reconfiguration of method and its dynamic relationality with its objects of study. While the results of such a reconfiguration are neither predetermined nor complete—"a search without finality or teleology," as Al-Saji states—creating a space that cultivates such reconfigurations would itself be an act that resists relating to method as something static and fixed.150 Thus, through a praxis of hesitant-disorientation, philosophy can relate to method in a way that makes explicit its spatial and temporal dimensions. By situating its methods within their contextual spatial and temporal framework, philosophy can cast off its traditional disinterested self-conception as timeless and placeless reflection. To think is always thinking from a perspective; and through a praxis of hesitant-disorientation, the position and history of that methodological perspective can appear and take on new meaning.

150 Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” 143.
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