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## Ways to thinking (the end)

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*“What is a thought which harms no one, neither thinkers nor anyone else?”*, asks Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*. But what, one must immediately ask, what could be a fragile and momentary thought that does not merely harm others, but that would persistently de(con)struct its ownmost *raison d'être*, namely thinking itself?

Such might be the thought without image<sup>1</sup> sought by Deleuze. And such is

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<sup>1</sup> And how is the image? “In general, making-sensible means the manner in which a finite creature is able to [...] create a look (image) from something. According to what and how something comes into view, look or image means something different. First of all, image can mean: the look of a determinate being to the extent that it is manifest as something at hand. It offers the look. As a derivation of this meaning, image can also mean: the look which takes a likeness of something at hand (likeness),<sup>1311</sup> i.e., a look which is the after-image of something no longer at hand or a look which is the premonition of a being [yet] to be produced for the first time. Then, however, “image” can also have the full range of meaning of look in general, in which case whether a being or a non-being will be intuitable in this look is not stated.” (Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997, p 65)

the thinking to be imagined here: to imagine such thought.

So this will be on thinking, this will be some thoughts on thinking, this will be on thinking thought as such. And what we are facing, here, right in this beginning, as if there could be a beginning, is a turning point<sup>2</sup>. For the crisis we are facing today (and we are always already facing a crisis) designates nothing but this: a decisive turn, a turning, or rather, a re-turning to signification. For crises are nothing but a critique (of) themselves; both concepts are, essentially, the same. Critique and crisis, if you allow me this arborescent fauxpas, share the same root: *krinein*, to decide, judge; certainly, both attempt to determine. Critique requires to constitute crises as such; crises, in turn,

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<sup>2</sup> Etymologically, a crisis is a turning point: the Greek *krisis* — from *krinein*, “to separate, decide, judge”— designates a “turning point in a disease”, whereas “critique” derives from *kritikos*, “able to make judgments,” which, in turn, is derived from *krinein*.

require critique in order to be acknowledged.

Obviously, both *are not*, are nothing given, but face a worn out Deleuzian becoming: both crisis and critique are to be created, each time, a singular time; in order to be brought forth, both are to be thought by thinking. Or, to reiterate Deleuze on Artaud: “To think is to create—there is no other creation—but to create is first of all to engender ‘thinking’ in thought.”<sup>3</sup>

As we remember, for Deleuze “the powers of difference and repetition” can unfold “only by putting into question the traditional image of thought.”<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, as he claims, “a philosophy which would be without any kind of presuppositions[...]would take as its point of departure a radical critique” of the moral, dogmatic Image of thought and its postulates (=and there are eight of them<sup>5</sup>). What Deleuze demands, as is well known, is “[a] new image of

thought—or rather, a liberation of thought from those images which imprison it”<sup>6</sup>.

Let us therefore begin with the presently so fashionable term of revolution, let us recall Deleuze’s famous assertion that the theory of thought, like painting, “needs that revolution which took art from representation to abstraction. This is the aim of a theory of thought without image”<sup>7</sup>.

And yet, there is nothing more old-fashioned than the revolution: *re-volvere* is nothing but to turn or roll back to a hidden origin or, even worse, to imagine that there could be an original origin. And so is the case with the Deleuzian conditions of a “true critique” and a “true creation”, which for him are the same, namely “the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself” and, as mentioned above, “the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself”<sup>8</sup>. To put it simple, creation and critique destruct the image of thought, which is why

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<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, London/New York: continuum 2004, 185.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xivf.

<sup>5</sup> Namely the postulate/s of the principle, of the ideal, of the model, of the element, of the negative, of logical function, of modality, and of the end or result. *Ibid.*, 207.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Xv.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

creation and critique are the condition of and for thinking. Of course it is not that simple. Neither of them questions the traditional image of thought<sup>9</sup> (which, if you allow me this premature conclusion, is a thinking of and as infinity). Critique, it is certain, still speaks the language of that which it tries to deconstruct: it must remain inside in order to recognize its object. Genesis, on the other hand, does not designate anything but yet another origin; to equate creation with genesis implies that there is a “there is”. This “there is”, a turning point, always, is named presence.

It is here, where we have come full circle, that the ellipse begins. The ellipse: Originally a term for non-identical figures or probably, as Deleuze would name it, a difference in itself. It is here that we must abandon these originary concepts, these conceptual origins, and it is here where thinking comes closer to us, were we could enter a finite thinking, for it is here where we have to think [in] finitude. “[T]he

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<sup>9</sup> The traditional image of thought: “everybody knows”.

essential nature of thinking”, as Heidegger concludes “What is called thinking”, “is determined by what there is to be thought about: the presence of what is present, the Being of beings.”

We, however, are not there yet; we, still in this beginning, we are still to face three questions. The first is re-iterating some rather Heideggerian questions, namely: what is that which we call thinking, what does thinking mean? The second is nothing but Deleuze’s conclusive question in the third chapter of *Difference and Repetition*: what is a thought without image? And, eventually, there is the question whether thinking these questions could open for a different thinking, a thinking of finitude, a finite thinking perhaps?

Dialectical as all this may sound, it is not—it *cannot* be. After all it is precisely finitude that “renders dialectic impossible and reveals its illusory character”, as Heidegger<sup>10</sup> reminds us.

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995, 209.

We shall thus commence to approach these questions with an impasse or, rather, a clumsy modification of his overture in *Being and Time*, that is: “Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word “thinking”?”

The answer is as banal as it is obvious: no. And this is because it is the wrong question. In order to approach thinking the question cannot be the worn-out, meta-physical “what is” (though for Deleuze<sup>11</sup> it all began with this Platonic question— a question still mistaken as “the” philosophical question). “What is” implies a “there is”, an origin of thought—to think “what is” it is nothing but the thinking of origin, even though Heidegger proposes four different ways of dealing with his “what is” (called thinking)<sup>12</sup>. In order to approach thinking, in order to conceive thinking as

such we must ask: how is, how is thinking, how is thinking to be thought? How is thought to be thought as such?

Such is the thought to be thought here. And there seems to be no point of reference, only turning points. Of thinking we cannot know, and every quest for it and every question about it must remain obscure. There is no point of origin, for it is not sufficient to merely introduce a new concept/ualization of thinking<sup>13</sup>. We have to think it, and we do not know what to think, because we do not (yet) know thinking. Thinking remains the question<sup>14</sup>.

“Of thought”, we recall Blanchot<sup>15</sup>, “it must first of all be said that it is the impossibility of sticking to anything definite—the impossibility, then, of thinking of anything determined— and that it is thus the permanent neutralization of all present thought at

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<sup>11</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche und die Philosophie*, trans. Bernd Schwibs, Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2002, 84.

<sup>12</sup> What is it what we call “thought” and “thinking”? How does traditional doctrine define what we have named thinking? What are the prerequisites we need so we may be able to think with rightness? And what is it that calls us or commands us to think? (Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray, New York: Perennial, 2004, 113ff. ).

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<sup>13</sup> As Heidegger points out, (ibid., 21), the question “what is called thinking?” cannot be answered by merely proposing a definition of the concept “thinking”.

<sup>14</sup> See Heidegger (ibid., 48): “What is called thinking? We must guard against the blind urge to snatch at a quick answer in the form of a formula. We must stay with the question.”

<sup>15</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, 33.

the same time that it is the repudiation of all absence of thought.” Or, as Nancy<sup>16</sup> puts it, “[t]hinking rejects abstraction and conceptualisation as these are recognized by understanding. Thinking does not produce the operators of a knowledge; it undergoes an experience, and lets the experience inscribe itself.”

Thinking is experience, thinking is as experience. To imagine a thought without image is to think thinking as such, and, as Heidegger has shown, “[t]hinking as such is[...]already the mark of finitude.”<sup>17</sup>

Finitude designates nothing but the actual condition for thinking, for thinking thought as such.

This is why thinking, taking place in finitude, is to be thought (of) as finitude: as incompleteness, as a thinking of the limit. As Nancy<sup>18</sup> reminds us, “any attempt to think such an ‘object’ is going

to have to marry its form or condition, while also being a finite thinking: a thinking that[...]is only ever able to think to the extent that it also touches on its own limit and its own singularity”.

To think thought without image is to think it in finitude, for thinking is, when thinking, always already finite. When finitude “is taken as infinite, then it is precisely *determined*”<sup>19</sup>; if it, on the other hand, “is set as finite, then its ab-groundness is affirmed”. This is why “[t]he thinking of finitude is itself a *finite* thinking because it has no means of access to *what it thinks, not even through thinking that it has no such access.*”<sup>20</sup>

Thus, and this is important, finitude is to be finite itself, it is to be thought as finitude: “All that remains for us is to think this *finite* character as such and without infinitizing it. This task is finite as any other. Equally, it’s certain. Yet this doesn’t mean that we have some knowledge of its accomplishment.

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<sup>16</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, “Shattered Love”, trans. Lisa Garbus and Simona Sawhney, in Jean-Luc Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, edited by Simon Sparks, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, 247 (245-274).

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, “A Finite Thinking”, trans. Edward Bullard, Jonathan Derbyshire, and Simon Sparks, in Nancy 2003, 5 (3-30).

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, 189.

<sup>20</sup> Nancy, “A Finite Thinking”, 19.

Everyone asks: 'What should we think?'[...]Well, what we have to think is this: that thought is never given, neither at the beginning nor at the end. From which it follows that it is never 'giveable' as such."<sup>21</sup>

Only by finitude is the world given; only  
by  
a finite thinking can the world be  
accessed  
as that how it is: in finitude. Only in  
finitude  
is there a thought without image, for it  
is  
within the *underway* that thinking is. The  
thinking to be imagined: en passant, on  
the  
way, underway, yet to become.  
We remember that for Heidegger the  
most "thought-provoking thing" (*das  
Bedenklichste*) is that we are still not  
thinking. This assertion, Heidegger<sup>22</sup>  
asserts, "says also that we are on the  
way, in thought, to the essence of  
thought. We are underway, and by such

ways have taken our departure from a  
thinking whose essential nature seems  
to lie in the forming of ideas and to  
exhaust itself in that." It is here, if we  
remain underway, and we are  
underway, that the "real nature of  
thought might reveal itself". And, as he  
already points out<sup>23</sup>, "[w]e ourselves are  
this underway, this transition, this  
'neither the one nor the other'. What is  
this oscillating to and fro between this  
neither/nor? Not the one and likewise  
not the other, this 'indeed, and yet not,  
and yet indeed'. What is the unrest of  
this 'not'? We name it *finitude*[...] Finitude is not some property that is  
merely attached to us, but is *our  
fundamental way of being*. If we wish to  
become what we are, we cannot  
abandon this finitude or deceive  
ourselves about it, but must safeguard  
it. Such preservation is the innermost  
process of our being finite, i.e., it is our  
innermost becoming finite. Finitude only  
*is* in truly becoming finite."

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>22</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, 45.

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<sup>23</sup> Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 6.

This, and perhaps nothing else, is the task of thinking. Thinking must think its radical

finitude. As Heidegger<sup>24</sup> puts it:

“Because philosophy opens out onto the whole of man

and onto what is highest in him, finitude must appear in philosophy in a completely

radical way”.

It must appear as absolute finitude, not as finite absolute. For, as he shows, “it remains to be considered that precisely the working-out of the innermost essence of finitude, which was demanded for the intended grounding of metaphysics, must itself always be fundamentally finite and can never become absolute. From that, however, only this follows: the renewed consideration of finitude cannot succeed by means of a reciprocal playing-out and equalizing of standpoints which mediates them in order, finally and yet nevertheless, to attain absolute knowledge of finitude, secretly put forth,

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<sup>24</sup> Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 207.

which is ‘true in itself.’ Rather, there remains only the working-out of the problematic of finitude as such. Finitude becomes manifest according to its ownmost essence if it is made accessible through unswerving application”<sup>25</sup>.

This is why the act of thinking is nothing but this: an exposure to the limit. Thinking a thought without image would be a thinking of the limit, a limited thinking, a finite thinking and a thinking of finitude. Thinking, thinking finitude, remains incomplete, always. For this is what finitude “means: unaccomplishment as the condition for the accomplishment of action (or for the accomplishment that action *is*)”<sup>26</sup>.

Only within the limit can there be thought, can thinking be thought.

The act of thinking is to remain a finite act. Finitude, naming the condition of and for our becoming-in-the-world, is ending: maybe always, we cannot know.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, “Original Ethics”, trans. Duncan Large, in Nancy 2003, 178 (172-195).

Each time, thinking must end, each time, once, always only once, thinking must come to its end and it must think itself: as the thinking of finitude. This end, it is certain, does not designate infinite endings; just one ending, each time, one singular time. It is through this its ending that thinking can be thought, for it is within such ending that thinking begins. And this beginning is to be thought of as and in the singularity of its origination: in finitude, that is.

Thinking, then, does not “mean” anything (and yet, “[t]he fact that thinking has no content doesn’t mean that it is empty”<sup>27</sup>): thinking thinks the fact that it thinks in finitude. Finitude “means precisely the non-fixing of [...] signification: not, however, as the powerlessness to fix it, but as the power to leave it open”<sup>28</sup>. Thinking must open for this openness, it must dare to think its in-signification. Such thinking, and here we follow Nancy<sup>29</sup> once more, is

“[n]ot a thinking of relativity, which implies the Absolute, but a thinking of *absolute finitude*: absolutely detached from all infinite and senseless completion or achievement. Not a thinking of limitation, which implies the unlimitedness of a beyond, but a thinking of the limit as that on which, infinitely finite, existence arises, and to which it is exposed.”

All this is to show that finitude is not merely another concept to be thought. Eluding its conceptualisation, it cannot be thought as yet another finite absolute, nor can it be thought as an infinite finitude; finitude must not be made infinite. As finitude, the thinking of finitude is not to be pre-defined; it must dare its openness. Hence the thought of finitude “is one that, on each occasion, thinks the fact that it is unable to think what comes to it [...] a finite thinking is one that is always surprised by its own freedom and by its own history, the finite history that produces events and sense

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<sup>27</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, “Concealed Thinking”, in Nancy 2003, 37 (31-47).

<sup>28</sup> Nancy, “Originary Ethics”, 178.

<sup>29</sup> Nancy, “A Finite Thinking”, 27.

across what is represented as the infinity of a senseless process”<sup>30</sup>

And finitude, without presence, cannot be re-presented.

Deleuze of course disagrees. For him, finitude and infinitude, both belonging to the domain of representation, are essentially the same. Indifferent to the essential difference between finitude and infinitude<sup>31</sup>, Deleuze does neither think finitude outside of representation nor does he apply difference to the supposed opposition of finitude:infinitude— rather, he argues, the “*entire alternative between finite and infinite applies very badly to difference*, because it constitutes only an antinomy of representation”. Infinite representation, he claims, “suffers from the same defect as finite representation: that of confusing the concept of difference in itself with the inscription of

difference in the identity of the concept in general”<sup>32</sup>.

While it is true that infinitude does not free itself from the principle of identity<sup>33</sup>, it is precisely within (the thinking of) finitude that differences un- and re-fold. This is why such thinking, marrying its object, is different, always different. Deleuze however, is convinced that difference is subordinated “to the requirement of finite or infinite representation”<sup>34</sup>, claiming that “[t]he world is neither finite nor infinite as representation would have it: it is completed and unlimited.”<sup>35</sup>

But just as it within finitude that differentiation takes place, it is precisely here, in finitude that is, where the world comes into existence for us, each time. For the world cannot be thought by us. The world offers itself as the limit, and it is to be thought as such: within a thinking of and at the limit.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>31</sup> Difference, however, ought to be related to difference, not to (its) opposition; difference being its *conditio sine qua non*, finitude always already differs in and as itself, not only in degree.

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<sup>32</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 61.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 69

Evidently, not just since Marx philosophers have tried to change the world. And yet, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*—the world is to be *thought*, the world is to be imagined. To be, to become is to become a world<sup>36</sup>: or, in allusion to Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is to world, becoming is to make a world.

And is here, at the end of the world as we know it, and we cannot know it, were we have to think the end: each time, “each time one time, the unique time.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and foreword by Brian Massumi, London/New York: continuum 2004, 308.

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Shibboleth: For Paul Celan”, based on a translation by Joshua Wilner, revised by Thomas Dutoit, in Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignities in Question. The Poetics of Paul Celan*, edited by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen, New York: Fordham University Press 2005, 63 (1-64).

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