LOVE, DESIRE, INDIVIDUATION:
INTERSECTIONS OF PLATO, SCHELLING AND DELEUZE

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ABSTRACT

Using an ontological framework derived from the work of Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Gilbert Simondon, my dissertation reinterprets the accounts of love found in Schelling’s *Ages of the World* and Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. My overarching aim is to produce an account of love that does not invoke the functions and structures of subjectivity (as conceived by much of Kantian and post-Kantian European philosophy). In doing so, I hope to explain an event (love) which is itself formative of, and hence excessive to, human or even divine subjectivity. Within this context, I attempt to articulate the precise relationship between two forms of love especially prominent in the Western philosophical tradition, namely *agape* and *eros*. Analyzing Schelling’s concept of “divine love” and Plato’s concept of *eros*, I argue, first, that there are important isomorphisms between the two forms of love; and second, that in each case, love can best be understood as an emergent feature of a larger system in which the experiencing subject is caught up. Finally, I show how and why the experiencing subject’s epistemic grasp of the larger system is constitutively limited, arguing that these limitations have important ethical consequences.
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INTRODUCTION

This project took its initial orientation from the problem of love. Such a strange and varied aggregate of experiences and phenomena, of rituals and affects, utterances and texts and relationships, falls under this name: how does it all work together, if it works at all? For example, what does the love attributed to the divine have to do with the love of finite beings? Can the name “love” be applied unequivocally to these two cases? In what ways is philosophy an act of love, and how might we best philosophize about our experiences of love? Conversely, what kind of ontology do our experiences of love themselves seem to imply or presuppose?

In the process of formulating these questions I encountered Gilbert Simondon's work on individuation, and found particularly intriguing his claim that there are important structural parallels or isomorphisms between different individuating systems. From the point of view of genesis, he argues, a salt crystal, a rat, a human being, and an ethical system might have a great deal more in common than we might think. As I read Schelling's *Ages of the World* and Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, looking for love, I came to focus more and more upon the processes of individuation described by these texts. For both Schelling and Plato, love and desire seemed to play an important role in the development of the individuating systems in question. This led me to wonder whether and to what extent the appearance and function of love and desire might be constant across these very different individuating systems; and whether this might give us a way to understand the relationships between the many different things we call “love”.

Throughout this investigation I relied upon an ontology drawn from the work of Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari, finding it to be most productive and congenial for asking the theoretical and practical questions that interested me. Several features of this ontology will therefore feature
prominently in my project. First of all, the distinction between virtuality and actuality, and the understanding of reality as something continually *produced* in the interactions of intensively differentiated systems,¹ are central to my understanding of love and its role in processes of individuation; I discuss these concepts in the first chapter, but draw upon them throughout the book. Secondly, Deleuze-Guattari’s articulation of systems, especially social systems, in terms of *assemblages* animated by dynamics of *deterritorialization* and *coding*, provides the framework for the discussion of erotic love in the second and third chapters. Finally, the ontology of desire in Deleuze-Guattari gives us the tools not only to describe human love, but to grasp how it might relate to the “ontological” love at work in Schelling's *Ages of the World*.

This should suffice as an indication of the basic elements of and sources for this project. My task for the remainder of this introduction is twofold. I will begin with an outline of my argument, mapping the unfolding of the questions of individuation, desire and love in the three major parts of this book. I will then say a few words about the nature of my project as a whole, and attempt to answer certain questions or objections the reader may have.

The first chapter follows and retells the narrative given by Schelling in the third version of the *Ages of the World*, with frequent digressions to explain and apply the other concepts—drawn from Simondon and Deleuze—that feature in my variation. Arguing that we can read the God of the *Ages of the World* as an intensively differentiated individuating system of the kind described by Simondon, I attempt to track the appearances of love and desire in this system. What we find is that although desire is a primordial component of the divine nature, *love* is not: it emerges, rather, at a very special systemic threshold, namely, the opening of space and time that takes place when divine freedom enters into relationship with necessary nature and freedom.

¹ Although these ideas recur throughout Deleuze's solo work and persist in his collaborations with Guattari, I rely most heavily upon their presentation in *Difference and Repetition*. 
Its emergence also seems to be contemporaneous with and implicated in that of a dimension of virtuality. Although the concept of ontological love will prove problematic, this association of love with virtuality will serve as an important key to understanding love in a human context.

The second and third chapters explore the question of human erotic relationships. For reasons explained below, I restrict my inquiry to a particular social and historical milieu (Athens of the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C.E.) and even a specific type of relationship (pedagogical pederasty, both in its traditional forms and with the modifications outlined in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*). The second chapter opens with an outline of Deleuze-Guattari's assemblage theory and ontology of desire, which provide the framework for my understanding of erotic phenomena: traditional pederasty, I argue, is best understood as a distinctive mechanism of social production, that is, a way of harnessing flows of desire within the Athenian socius so as to produce individuals (citizens) of a certain type. The problem, however, with the traditional pederastic mode of civic production is its unreliability; it is at least in part as a response to this problem that the reformed “philosophical” pederasty of the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* should be understood. Throughout the second chapter I examine the ways in which the interlocutors of these two dialogues propose and enact the deterritorialization and decoding of erotic flows, processes transforming both erotic practices and poetic or literary forms of expression. Ultimately, the dialogues propose to “solve” the problem of pederasty by liberating (or deterritorializing) *eros* from the sphere of politics and political production, offering in place of these a reminder of the integration of *eros* in a more general cosmic economy, and an invitation to lovers not only to participate in this economy at the highest level (that of philosophical production), but to value and welcome the intensive movement of *eros* itself.

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2 As opposed to, say, a perverse or subversive form of relationship tolerated by the community only because it could not be eradicated.
The third chapter continues this discussion, but returns to the earlier focus upon individuation. What effects does the pederastic relationship (now viewed as individuating system) have upon the already-constituted individuals (the lover and the beloved) who participate in it? What other productions—of deeds, of speeches, or simply of intensities upon the soul—take place? I argue that eros names a particular experience of the relationship between virtuality and actuality: eros attunes us to the excess of the former to the latter. Both lover and beloved take shape according to this attunement, to the extent that they claim (or desire to claim) as their own project the exploration of, care for, and actualization of this virtual excess. Otherwise put, the erotic experience reorients the individual within his or her individuating system or milieu in such a way as to open up distinctive new possibilities for individuation. Because the participants' understanding of the erotic system is itself a determining factor in their individuation, much of the force of the “reforms” suggested in the dialogues lies in the introduction not of prescriptions for erotic practice, but of a new theoretical framework within which the participants can interpret and come to grips with the affects they experience.

Having provided an outline of my investigation, I should try to give the reader a sense of what I perceive to be at stake here. Above all, I wanted to give an account of love that would not be premised upon a conception of subjectivity (be it divine or human) as originary and definitive. I am persuaded by the claim that subjectivity is a product of underlying processes and formations that cannot themselves be accounted for on the basis or according to the logic of subjectivity; and I take love to be, at least in part, such a pre- or a-subjective process. What is it, after all, that makes love so difficult to define, if not its propensity to blend the most personal experiences, the

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3 This claim is common to many contemporary thinkers—including Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari—and is often traced back to Freud and Nietzsche; we find, however, versions of it even earlier (in Schelling, for example, as I show in the first chapter).
most intimate affects, with what is bluntly impersonal, and to insistently confront the constituted subject with the conditions of that subject's formation? In love—be it friendly, erotic, mystical, parental, or even patriotic—the subject is plunged into the element of its own (un)making. When we center our accounts of love exclusively upon human subjectivity, without due attention to what precedes, exceeds, and escapes subjectivity at every turn, we risk missing much of what is going on and misunderstanding the rest. And because the problem of love is such a very practical one, the misunderstanding can be harmful—or at the least, very limiting—for our relations with ourselves, with each other, and with the whole milieu of living and non-living beings in which we find ourselves.

From this perspective, the concept of “ontological” love—that is, love as an affect or event “proper” or “native” to being itself, that would inhere in the happening of being (and beings) without the need for an experiencing subject—has much to offer. On the other hand, generating such a concept might prove difficult or impossible, given the ways in which our thinking about love on a cosmic scale tends to find itself entangled with the ontotheological traditions of a divine Person or persons. Schelling's text gives us particular cause for concern: while the Ages of the World drafts break off before the emergence of anything resembling fully-fledged subjectivity, human or divine, such an emergence is always on the horizon, and it's arguable that the terms Schelling uses in his narration of the divine prehistory (including “love”) already presuppose and prefigure the divine Subject to come. Instead of leading us to a-subjective and impersonal love, this path of inquiry could easily end up reintroducing the subject everywhere. I therefore conclude the first chapter with the suggestion that although we can get a concept of ontological love from Schelling's text, that concept might not be able to do the work we want it to do.
It remains possible, however, to generate an ontological account of love, and to take what we have learned from Schelling about the relationship between love and individuation as a rough guide for where and how we might expect love to function in human contexts. This is what I attempt to do in the discussion of erotic experience that occupies the remainder of the book. Here, however, we encounter a further complication, namely that despite the clear isomorphisms between human erotic systems and the cosmic system described by Schelling, the former display important discontinuities with the latter when it comes to the role played by love. Schelling's text argues persuasively for a key distinction, in nature and in function, between desire and love; in human systems, by contrast, this distinction tends to be either nonexistent or inexact. I argue that this is not simply a question of terminology, or, more precisely, that the difference in terminology stems from important differences in the systems concerned, in the knowledge we can have of these systems, and in the impact of this knowledge upon the systems' functioning. The resistance of the term *eros* either to adequate translation or to decomposition into more primitive components is itself, I will argue, very revelatory of the phenomena in question, even as it complicates my attempts to give a comprehensive and consistent account.

At this point, I should alert the reader to the limitations of my project; for the account presented here is explicitly and self-consciously *partial*, in several senses. First of all, and most obviously, this is not a comprehensive survey of Western theories and experiences of love. Questions of scope alone have required that I be selective in the evidence I examine. Nor is my account intended to encompass or replace other existing philosophical theories of love, or to supersede other readings of the texts on which I rely; instead, I hope to have produced a point of view that can stand in a relationship of complementarity—if not always a comfortable
complementarity—and potential dialogue with competing perspectives.

Yet the limitations of my account stem only in part from the problem of scope; in a more significant respect, I believe such limitations to be imposed by at least two intrinsic features of the subject matter itself—not to mention a substantial strategic consideration. The first of these features concerns the social and historical nature of our experiences of love. Leaving aside, for the moment, the question of whether we can or should posit love as a basic feature of the constitution of reality, the field of human experience alone manifests important differences between superficially similar relationships. For example, what is an erotic relationship? According to one common modern perspective, the distinctive feature of the erotic is its connection to “sex” and “sexuality” (terms the definition of which poses a separate set of problems). In the Symposium and the Phaedrus, by contrast, we find a view of eros in which beauty, not sex, plays the definitive role. Are these two definitions simply incompatible? No—but nor do they seem reducible to an identical underlying concept. Going further, we could reasonably doubt whether there is even an identical underlying experience of the erotic at stake. As I will argue in the second and third chapters, practice and theory alike seem strongly to indicate that what gets experienced and articulated as a distinctively and primarily erotic (as opposed to friendly, parental, pedagogical, charitable, etc...) relationship depends heavily on context. There is always an extensive set of criteria regarding affect, bodily and discursive comportment, implicit goals, norms and prohibitions at work to determine whether the relationship between X and Y is (or could be) an “erotic” one—and just what that means.4

Tempting as it might be to say, “I may not be able to define an erotic relationship, but I know one

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4 For example, erotic experience has been variously construed as “naturally” or “properly” directed toward pleasure, or biological reproduction, or emotional intimacy, or some other end entirely. Nowadays this state of affairs is complicated further by (well-founded) suspicions that the “natural” ends we ascribe to erotic relationships are partly or mostly a front to conceal social operations such as the enforcement of gender norms and the unequal distribution of power across social groups.
when I see it!”, we need to be cautious here, given the extent to which what we “see” is always conditioned by what we are permitted, taught, and encouraged to see. For this reason, I feel that we are in no position right now to generate a universal (trans-historical, cross-cultural) account of human love; perhaps we will never be able to do so. At best we can indicate certain continuities or recurring features across differing contexts, and this is what I have tried to do when possible.

The second intrinsic limitation I have encountered cuts even more deeply than the first, since it operates internally to any given erotic relationship. As I will argue toward the end of the final chapter, love, especially human erotic love, seems intrinsically to be the sort of event of which only partial accounts are possible—there is no possible perspective from which some element does not always elude us, evanescing even as we try to grasp it. This is the problem expressed in the Phaedrus by the language of madness: in order to participate fully in the economy of love, and to enjoy the singular insights it offers, the lover must sacrifice other perspectives with important insights of their own.5 In other words, the positions of lover, beloved, and even the non-lover as knowers of an erotic system are “standpoints”, in something akin to the sense elaborated by standpoint theory: the very passional engagements, or lack thereof, that grant the knower a certain epistemic privilege impose equally profound epistemic privations.6

Perspectival limitations aside, I believe that there are strong practical reasons not to privilege a single theory of love to the absolute exclusion from consideration of all the others. I say this simply because problems of love tend most often to present themselves as problems of

5 In The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), ch.6, Nussbaum makes a somewhat similar claim, arguing that the speeches of Alcibiades and Socrates reveal two distinctive ways of erotic “knowing”, both partial, and neither of which can simply be subsumed under the other, nor, perhaps, assimilated to wholly adequate perspective within the erotic relationship itself—not in the context of that dialogue, at any rate.

6 Nor is it possible to predict how one's explicitly erotic commitments will bear upon other social factors which are (in their own way, although often less overtly) just as charged with desire.
practice that each of us must solve for him- or herself each time anew; every love-event is unique, and thus somewhat unpredictable. Would it not be unwise to discard in advance from our conceptual repertoire any approach or line or interpretation that might be of value in the future, on the grounds that our current strategy has worked well for us thus far?

Having established the selective and partial nature of this inquiry, we can turn to questions of method. Two questions seem especially pertinent. The first concerns the centrality of textual evidence (especially very old textual evidence) to this project, which might well strike the reader as inappropriate given the topic of my inquiry. Unlike a quark, or the battle of Thermopylae, love would appear to be immediately accessible to contemporary first-person experience. Why, then, would I prefer to rely on the testimony of the ancients, rather than undertake a phenomenological or psychoanalytical investigation of my own experience—or, at least, of the experiences of my contemporaries? Why have I taken as my point of departure Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*? The reader might well suspect that I have been seduced away from living reality by the power of the cold, dead word, or that I have been driven by asceticism or *pudeur* to focus on some safely dead Greek lovers, rather than addressing the way in which the living love.

In fact, there are several reasons why I believe my approach to be well-suited to the matter at issue. Most obviously, there is the question of theoretical resources. I want to generate a theory about love; the thinkers on whom I rely throughout this project seem to me to get a lot of things right about love, and it makes more sense to take up, elaborate, and combine their insights than to reinvent the wheel. What's more, we don't enter into erotic relationships, however personal, idiosyncratic, and heartfelt they may be (and however inexperienced we may be) as
cultural “virgins”. As I suggested above, what even counts as such a relationship—let alone the ways in which we understand it and navigate it—is always already conditioned by the discourse(s) and practices circulating within our socio-historical context. Whether we like it or not, there's always one or more texts or “scripts” in play. I have inherited fragments of Greek lovers and beloveds, of the courtly lover and his lady, of the tousle-haired Romantic (to name only a few), who are always somehow speaking and acting and feeling on my behalf. Interrogating these fragments—which means revisiting the milieus from which they originate, the discourses and practices associated with them—is thus, at the very least, an essential preparatory task for understanding what takes place when “I” love. For this reason, although my analysis of the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* does not in itself adequately explain or describe the workings of our contemporary erotic systems, I feel that it does help lay the groundwork for further investigation of these systems.

The texts at our disposal also help us to face the epistemological challenges posed by the erotic systems in which we find ourselves. Since any perspective—be it that of the impassioned lover or that of the disinterested observer—has its limitations, the act of multiplying perspectives and voices can give us, if not a total view of the situation, the closest thing humanly possible. And when the texts themselves seem expressly designed to present the interplay of multiple voices, when they frame the question in light of this multiplicity—as is the case with Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*—it makes sense to privilege them as starting points for our investigation.

The second major methodological question I would anticipate from the reader concerns the relationship between the very different texts and traditions featured here. How do Plato, Schelling, Simondon, Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari function together?
My project concerns individuating systems, systems in which the problematic co-existence of disparate elements finds a solution (however partial or provisional) through the production of one or more individuals. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the project itself has turned out to be such a system: the disparate texts and concepts of Plato, Schelling, Deleuze (and Deleuze-Guattari) posed a problem, and what you are now reading is an attempt at a solution. The type of solution I have sought is less one of subordination or assimilation than one of connection and production. As I state in the first chapter, I have tried to discover or create the zones of affinity in which disparate conceptual elements can most easily connect to produce a theory that works. I take these neighborhoods to be relative rather than absolute—relative, that is, to the specific questions of love and individuation in response to which they have taken shape. In the context of these questions, concepts drawn from, say, Schelling and Simondon connect (relatively) easily and fruitfully; I do not assume that this would be the case for all possible questions.

In other words, I'm not trying to claim that Schelling, Plato, Deleuze, and Simondon are really all saying the same thing, or that we can trace everything of value in one thinker forward or backward to any one of the others. When I propose, therefore, to read Schelling's account through the lens of Simondon's theory of individuation, or to rethink certain aspects of the Phaedrus in terms of Deleuze's virtual/actual distinction, this is not intended to pass as a faithful exegesis, as though the best of one thinker were already present, latent, in his predecessor—or, conversely, as though Plato or Schelling somehow “needed” the concepts drawn from a later thinker in order to clarify their own thinking.

On the other hand, and without denying the need to approach a thinker on his or her own terms, I believe that there is much to be gained by introducing a thinker's concepts and
interrogative trajectories into novel contexts and combinations. In complex individuating systems—such as those comprised by a text or group of texts—no one line of individuation, however successful, can ever be exhaustive; the actualization of some systemic capacities tends to preclude the development of others. To truly know the full extent of the resources possessed by the system, we need to play out these multiple lines. We might view the philosophical texts of our tradition as something like musical scores, which lend themselves to and even seem to demand not just multiple performances but multiple divergent performative “uses”. One musician takes up a Bach fugue to perform it on the eighteenth century instruments for which it was originally composed, while another rearranges it for guitar and synthesizer, or rewrites it for a dodecaphonic system, or takes a thematic fragment as the basis for free improvisation. Not only can each of these performances succeed as a performance tout court, but each may very well reveal capacities inherent in the original score that would otherwise have remained latent. It is in this spirit that I have attempted, at times, to play Plato or Schelling in the key of Deleuze, or to generate rhizomatic variations on the themes these thinkers offer.

A final word, concerning what may seem to the reader to be the unwarranted privileging of a distinctively “masculine” experience of eros in the second and third chapters. Having narrowed my focus to the Phaedrus and the Symposium (for the reasons explained above), I had a choice between two approaches. The first would be to abstract from the particular type of relationship these dialogues take as paradigmatic (viz., the relationship between an older male lover and a younger male beloved), and attempt to derive basic principles that would be applicable to any possible erotic relationship; the second would be to demonstrate how the concept of eros and the suggestions for erotic practice found in the dialogues are inextricably entangled with the original constitution of the pederastic relationship and the social context this
implies. In my opinion, the first approach, if I were to attempt it at all, could be more profitably undertaken after thorough exploration of the second. I therefore decided to study the erotics of the dialogue in reference to their original social context, which necessitated a focus upon male experience. Within the context of this project, I find such a focus to be acceptable and worthwhile; not because I believe male experience to be more important than other possible experiences, or because I think conclusions drawn on the basis of male experience could serve as a universalizable template for understanding other experiences; but rather because it may ultimately enable us to grasp just how much of this experience and its articulation is highly contingent, tied not to human nature or some “essential” facts of biological male-ness, but rather to social constructions of gender and to the political exigencies of a particular time and place. Are the erotic descriptions and prescriptions I find in the dialogues sorely in need of critical interrogation? Of course. But doing justice to this problem is a separate project in and of itself.
CHAPTER ONE: ONTOLOGICAL LOVE

I. Itinerary

We want to know whether, and in what sense, we can speak of love as an ontological event.

This line of questioning is an experiment. It is quite easy for us, in the contemporary cultural situation, to talk about love as an experience shared between an already constituted “me” and “you”. A singular, plural or collective “me”; a human, animal, or divine “you”? It hardly matters; nor is it really a question of whether and to what extent this thing called love might subsequently challenge or undo the various identities involved. What interests me is where love begins, or where it seems to begin, and the story we tell about the beginning of love is overwhelmingly just this: “me”, and “you”, face to face.

The experiment, then, would be to see whether it’s possible and worthwhile to conceive of a strictly impersonal love. Or, at any rate, to determine precisely what minimum of personhood or subjectivity—better, what minimum degree of individuation (which is something else entirely)—accompanies love as its formal requirement. Can we locate the emergence of love prior to the emergence of any fully-fledged individual? Before it arises between a recognizable “me” and “you”, might love happen as a capacity or phenomenon proper to a pre-individual field of being? And, if so, in what relation would such a capacity or phenomenon stand to the love between individuals?

So much for the nature of the question. The real difficulty here lies in the indeterminacy of what we’re asking about. In fact it is quite difficult to imagine what form love might take when it’s not attached to a person, and even more difficult to know where in the infinite stretches of thought, history, experience, geography, and so forth, to start looking for manifestations of this
mostly unimaginable phenomenon. In our approach to this problem, therefore, we’ll follow the example of Socrates in the Republic: Having determined that the nature and function of justice will appear most vividly in the context of an entire city, rather than that of an individual soul, Socrates suggests that in “watch[ing] a city coming into being in speech” the interlocutors might “also see its justice coming into being, and its injustice.”\(^1\) The subsequent investigation does succeed (at least nominally) in locating the emergence of justice over the course of the city’s development; more importantly, it articulates the complex causal, material, and rhetorical entanglements between individual and collective justice, as well as the irreducible differences between the two.

The fruitfulness of this genetic approach has inspired us to turn to Schelling’s own book of genesis, The Ages of the World,\(^2\) in which he describes how a divine Person emerges from the interactions of primitive, unconscious, pre- and impersonal forces. In the process, he describes the coming into being of Love itself, in such a way that the coming into being of love does not coincide with or follow, but rather precedes and conditions, the coming into being of God qua loving Person. Now, love’s implication in divine genesis is neither unproblematic nor intuitively obvious. One cannot help but ask the following kind of question: in the absence of personhood, (inter)-subjectivity, body, gender—in the absence of space, time, or any full existence at all, for that matter—and, hence, in the absence of any of the factors or elements typically invoked to define, describe, explain, or situate love as we know it—in the absence of all this, how can Schelling speak of love without equivocation? And if Schelling is not equivocating here, if love can and should be said of the auto-affection of a tormented and unconscious God, then what does

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this mean for our understanding of human love? Schelling’s text offers us a royal road for thinking through an impersonal, purely ontological love; my hope is that it will also offer us the resources necessary to confront the incommensurability between this love and its human counterpart, and to think the belonging together or alliance-across-difference of the two.

A final disclaimer or warning about the territory ahead. What follows is less a textual exegesis than a retelling of—and variation upon—the events narrated by Schelling. Variation, when it occurs, will follow avenues opened up both by Gilbert Simondon’s work on individuation and by the Deleuzian distinction between the virtual and the actual. The result will be something like the “philosophically bearded Hegel [or] philosophically clean-shaven Marx” (a philosophically smiling Schelling, giving the lie to the famous old—and famously unflattering—photograph?) mentioned by Deleuze in the Preface to Difference and Repetition: a philosophical method, for an experimental question.

The Deleuzian involvement, however, requires that we begin by making a rather extensive detour.

II. An Admittedly Lengthy Note Concerning Two Concepts of Difference

Perhaps the greatest barrier to a productive encounter between Deleuze and Schelling consists in the concepts of difference indigenous to their respective lines of thought. The difficulty is twofold; not only do these concepts appear incommensurable, but each implies an entire worldview, with ethical, aesthetic, onto- and theological consequences. According to German Idealist

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orthodoxy, difference finds its most powerful and authentic form in contradiction. To begin with, we must posit such a contradiction within the depths of being itself, as a necessary condition of life: “if everything were in peace, then…nothing would want to stir itself and everything would sink into listlessness.” Implicit here is an awareness of the deadly forces of inertia and entropy—how difficult it is to make anything happen, to make anything move, and how arduous it is to sustain this movement! If the world were a clockwork mechanism it would require only the initial attentions of a divine Watchmaker to set it upon its frictionlessly eternal course (at most intervening in the event of some malfunction); but the world is a heat engine, with an engine’s energetic requirements. Hegel and Schelling therefore conceived an ontological engine that ran on contradiction, of which there is a seemingly limitless supply; in Schelling’s words, “Contradiction is the power mechanism and what is innermost of life.”

On the other hand, we don’t have to delve into the entrails of being qua being in order to find contradiction. Objects array themselves before us in the guise of indifferent diversity—but closer investigation reveals contradiction at every turn. For instance, the breakfast table: rather than allowing me to enjoy my meal in peace, Hegel would insist that simply to note the qualitative diversity of the apple, the orange, and the banana is to misconceive what’s really going on in the fruit basket. In order to grasp it fully, we need to detect the contradiction invisibly structuring the phenomenon. Jean Hyppolite explains this non-intuitive transition from multiplicity to opposition:

Opposition is inevitable not because there is only a multiplicity of things…but

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4 The following description draws predominantly upon the Hegelian version of this position, since it is against this Hegelian version that Deleuze argues most strenuously, and since it seems congruent with Schelling’s view of contradiction as it appears in the Weltalter.


6 Cf. Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, Order out of Chaos: Man’s New Dialogue with Nature (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), p.111: “For classical mechanics the symbol of nature was the clock; for the Industrial Age, it became a reservoir of energy that is always threatened with exhaustion.”

because each is in relation with the others, or rather with all the others, so that its 
distinction is its distinction from all the rest. The complete distinction of a thing 
reconnects it to the whole universe, reduces differences to…the difference 
between a thing or a determination and its other.⁸

What constitutes this apple in its determinacy is above all its relationship to its other(s), of which 
there is ultimately only one: everything that is not this apple. This oppositional structure, 
moreover, governs not only the relationship between discrete things but even that between the 
various properties of a single thing: as John Russon notes, the determinateness of color (for 
example) “as ‘this’ property is implicitly a repelling, a negation, of any other property.”⁹ The 
apparently solid and uncomplicated identity of the apple belies the fact that it is riddled with 
contradictions and difference, to such an extent that these latter comprise the genetic conditions 
of the apple’s identity.

Inseparable from this understanding of difference as contradiction is a characterization of 
difference as negation. We could say that what might at first glance appear as a static or passive 
contradiction is always simultaneously and primarily an active process or event of negation. 
“The Absolute is only by determining itself, that is, by limiting itself, by negating itself”¹⁰—an 
ontological necessity defining the manifestation of difference on every level and in every sphere 
of existence, from the real death and dissolution of finite beings, to the disparity in consciousness 
between the subject—the “I”—and its substance. The constitution both of objective identity (i.e., 
the apple in the basket) and subjective identity (my identity as the perceiving subject, but also, 
ultimately and inextricably, the subjectivity of the Absolute itself) occurs as a complex web of 
transactions between these self-othering identities.

Let’s examine just a few of the productive negations comprising the perpetual autopoesis

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of human subjectivity. The newborn baby acquires the first rudiments of selfhood in her experience of the mother’s body as distinct from the infant’s own: the boundaries of a discrete, determinate body emerge through negation (‘That’s not me!’ the infant would say if she could). Many years later, an analogous process will unfold as the adolescent subject constructs her personal identity through the reaction against—that is, the negation of—the values and expectations of her family. Finally, the subject attains a developmental landmark when she recognizes that any “content” she has posited as essential to her innermost self—her thoughts, emotions, memories, ambitions, preferences, and passions, that is, the mental landscape or décor generated over prior negations and now affirmed as most characteristically and intimately the subject’s own—is itself only contingent and non-identical to the very subject position from which she attempts to affirm it. In such a way, subjectivity proves that its most authentic “identity” consists purely in its power to differ from and to negate any determinate, substantial identity. Such affirmations as the subject achieves occur only through the mediation of multiple negations; what’s more, the ultimate object of affirmation turns out to be nothing other than the process of negation itself, viz., the life of the Absolute as it unfolds in every domain of existence.

In an ideal (or “idealist”) text, the foregoing concept of difference would have shown itself in its performance of the differentially repetitive figures of the dialectic. This has not happened, and I have produced, at best, the skeleton of the concept, a mere residue of its living reality. Despite these deficiencies, we must now take a moment to consider its rival.

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11 Such negations operate both in the past tense of already having shaped the various strata of consciousness, and in the contemporaneous structuring of the subject’s worldly existence. For the sake of brevity I will focus upon the former, “historical” element.

12 Of course (as Hegel demonstrates in the dialectic of Sense-Certainty), the fact that we can and must use language to articulate this pre-linguistic event, is itself a negation of any pretense to having the pre-linguistic experience in an “immediate” way.

13 This reaction need not take the form of an explicit rejection; merely the act of questioning these values and expectations—that is, of positing them as potentially contingent and relative—suffices to negate them as immediately constitutive of the questioning subject’s identity.
As early as 1954, at the conclusion of his review of Hyppolite’s *Logic and Existence*, Deleuze asked, “Can we not construct an ontology of difference which would not have to go up to contradiction, because contradiction would be less than difference and not more?”¹⁴ Fourteen years later he answered his own challenge in *Difference and Repetition*. In this work, he maintains that negation fails in its role as the privileged operation of difference: it starts off on the wrong foot, by conceiving difference upon the basis of (ontological, systematic, subjective) identity, and compounds the error by subordinating this (already subdued) difference to the interests of this (already guaranteed) identity. Far from composing the most robust form of difference, oppositions and contradictions appear only as the result of the prior simplification and homogenization of “a pluralism of free, wild, or untamed differences”.¹⁵ Difference submits only to such domestication when it has been taught—or forced—to desire identity.¹⁶

Deleuze’s critique of contradiction attempts to open a space for an alternative concept of difference. But what makes him think that his own concept will be any more viable? First, let us note that his evocation of a pack or swarm of untamed differences does not in itself suffice as an alternative to the Hegelian conception: we’ve seen already that Hegel readily admits the existence of such a non-oppositional plurality as an important moment in the dialectic of perception. In other words, simply replacing an oppositional pair with a multiplicity won’t do the trick. Nor do Deleuze’s references to depth solve the problem;¹⁷ although depth is an important figure of immanence in *Difference and Repetition*, it offers only the dimension (“spatium”) in which non-oppositional differences could “hide”—still lacking is the means whereby these

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¹⁵ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.50/71.
¹⁶ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.51/73.
¹⁷ See, for example, Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.51/72; here depth is described as “originary” and “primary”, the home of affirmative and multiple difference, and contradiction is simply the (inadequate) projection of these differences upon a flat surface.
differences could elude the logic of oppositional relationships in the first place. Finally, Deleuze’s issue seems to be less with contradiction as such, and more with the latter’s intimate relation to negation, to an *ethos* of the negative, taking this *ethos* as the illness diagnosed by Nietzsche as the greatest burden—albeit a productive one—upon Western society and thought. Again, however, the articulation of the need for an affirmative philosophy of difference does not itself constitute a coherent concept of difference, but at most clears the ground for such constitution. In order to generate a genuine alternative to negative difference, Deleuze must address the original argument used by Hegel to reduce to opposition the indifferent plurality of differences. In what follows, I shall attempt to summarize the way in which he does so.

The centrality of negation in Hegel’s concept of difference derives, at least in part, from a particular concept of *determination* (to exist is to be determinate, to be determinate is to negate and to be negated). Deleuze, on the other hand, follows both Henri Bergson and Gilbert Simondon in their pursuit of a philosophy of *virtuality* and *individuation*. Consider Simondon (of whom we will shortly have more to say)—consider, in particular, his critique of both the “atomist” and the “hylomorphic” approaches to the problem of individuation. These traditional ways of thinking individuation have gone astray (he claims) by selecting the wrong point of departure—namely, by granting “an ontological privilege to the [already] constituted individual.”19 This means not only that such theories take the already constituted individual as their object of study,20 but also that they rely illegitimately upon principles or entities that themselves possess the status of individuals (an atom is an “individual”), after all, albeit in a very

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18 As representatives of atomism (or “substantialism”, as he calls it), Simondon presumably has in mind such figures as Spinoza or Hobbes; for the hylomorphic theory, Aristotle is the primary example.


20 The historical inclination of Western philosophy to privilege the experience of the *adult* human being serves to illustrate this point.
limited sense; so is an Aristotelian “form”.) In doing so, they skip over, obscure, or defer indefinitely the question of how something like an individual could ever have come to be in the first place.

Determination-through-negation also seems susceptible to this critique: some tiny kernel of perceived identity—that is, some minimally individuated being or phenomenon—must pre-exist the first negation to give it something to sink its teeth into. Or, to put it slightly differently, the logic of determination-through-negation begins with the experience of an already (at least partially) constituted perceiving individual subject, one attempting to make sense of what looks like an already constituted (already individuated) world; although the subsequent movement of the dialectic proceeds to complicate and transform this initial stance, the latter persists in the form of a bias towards constituted individuality. It’s hard to deny that determination-through-negation applies remarkably well to a particular realm of experience. But what if there are other realms, governed by other rules?

For his part, Deleuze largely renounces any conceptual claim to the realm of already constituted individuals, insisting that the “differences” observed therein are, strictly speaking, mere diversity: “Difference is not diversity. Diversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given…as diverse. Difference is not phenomenon, but the noumenon closest to the phenomenon.”21 In other words, the difference for which Deleuze seeks a concept is to be found further upstream. We need to wrench our gaze away from the spectacle of constituted individuality, and seek out the pre-individual conditions of individuation.

But what’s the way upstream? For Simondon, as we shall see, individuation results from an initial difference (disparation) within an energetic system; when asked, “Disparation between what?” Deleuze replies on his behalf: the disparation (dis-parity, constitutive inequality) between

21 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.222/286.
intensive differences. To begin with, we can think of the quantifiable intensive phenomena articulated by such disciplines as physics and chemistry: “differences of level, temperature, pressure, tension, potential”.\(^{22}\) Without exhausting the set of possible types of intensive difference, these physical phenomena do illustrate the structure and behavior of such differences—even when the intensities at issue are linguistic, aesthetic, and/or conceptual (“words are genuine intensities within certain aesthetic systems; concepts are also intensities from the point of view of philosophical systems”).\(^{23}\) Intensive difference recurs across wildly dissimilar contexts, not in the similarity of elements but in a characteristic productive relation between these elements.

This relation can be formally described as follows. Each intensity is “constituted by a difference which itself refers to other differences”;\(^{24}\) this means that each intensity is both coupled to another (different) intensity, and infinitely decomposable into other such couplings.\(^{25}\) Like Hegelian difference, then, intensive difference posits relationality as constitutive of reality. Unlike Hegelian difference, however, intensive difference does not couple its components (intensities) in a relationship of reciprocal negation through which each component would receive its determination. Instead—and here an energetic model is most helpful—the very disparity within and between these couplings acts to generate something new. In other words, it’s never a question of the further determination or differentiation of the intensities themselves (and hence there is no need for the negations concomitant with determination); such a determination—the differenciation of actual individuals—is itself a product of the genetic power of intensive difference.

\(^{22}\) Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.222/286.
\(^{23}\) Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.118/155.
\(^{24}\) Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.117/155.
\(^{25}\) Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.222/286.
If we examine further the nature of this genesis, we will begin to understand the relationship between intensive and negative difference. The catch is that intensive difference never appears “in itself”, but only “as already developed within an extensity, and as covered over by qualities.” Extensity here means the metric space and linear time that governs just about every object or event occurring on the physical scale accessible to unaided human perception—in short, the world of our everyday experience. We are being asked to consider the possibility that this everyday experience is itself derivative of an entirely different set of relations, such that extensity would be not just the veil, but the *product*, of intensity—intensive differences would generate the very extensive structures which in turn conceal or dissemble the conditions of their genesis.

This hypothesis requires both justification and further clarification. To this end, we’ll turn to Manuel DeLanda’s account of the genesis of metric space. DeLanda defines space in general as “a set [of points] together with a way of binding these points together into *neighborhoods* through well-defined relations of *proximity or contiguity*.” Metric or Euclidean space displays the property of fixed distances between points. Non-Euclidean (e.g., differential and topological) geometries have emerged in response to the discovery that proximity—and spatial relations in general—need not entail fixed distances; a topological space, for example, “may be stretched without the neighborhoods which define it changing in nature.” Above all, it’s possible to transform a non-metric space into a metric one, that is, to generate the latter from the former, via a series of broken symmetries producing “progressively more differentiated geometric spaces.”

So far, we’ve been speaking of mathematical or logical genesis: but what if this genesis

26 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.223/228.
were the mathematical *expression* of a genuine physico-ontological event? Suppose that the real space we inhabit (including the spatially extended bodies “within” that space) is the product of a concrete physical process in which an undifferentiated *intensive space* (that is, a space defined by continuous intensive properties) progressively differentiates, eventually giving rise to *extensive structures* (discontinuous structures with definite metric properties).\(^{30}\)

In the language we have been using, “extensive” or “discontinuous” structures are constituted individuals and determinate identities. In contrast, the intensive space is “continuous” exactly to the extent that such individuals and identities—and the discontinuities these entail—have not yet actualized themselves.

The concept of actualization brings us to a final consideration. Although we have been speaking of intensive difference, intensity alone does not in fact suffice for an adequate concept of difference, especially in the context of individuation. We need to be able to explain phenomena so complex as to seem like reproductions of pre-given models; we need to grasp how the interaction of intensities could give rise to such complex phenomena *without* the introduction of such a pre-given model or plan. At this juncture Deleuze turns to Bergson’s concept of the *virtual*.

Virtuality includes everything that is real without being actual: the sounds silently poised upon a page of musical notation, the phenotype lurking within the genotype, the thousands of unwritten poems thronged around every actually existing poem… the latent, the dormant, the still-to-be-actualized. In contrast to the traditional category of “possibility”, which involves realization according to “rules of resemblance and limitation”\(^{31}\) (the realization of a possibility = possibility + existence; as Kant says, there is no *conceptual* difference between the two dollars in

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my pocket and the ones I only wish I had—hence resemblance; but alas, not every possibility fits through the sieve of reality—hence limitation, the virtual becomes actual through a process of differentiation: it “must create its own lines of actualization in positive acts.” Think of the non-resemblance between a living organism and its DNA: what is virtual here is not the DNA itself (which actually exists), but rather the options for existence enveloped within it.

Virtuality relates to intensity in a two-fold way. On the one hand, that which has virtual existence is differentiated within itself in an intensive (rather than extensive) manner; on the other, the actualization of the virtual typically occurs via material-energetic intensive differences. (That is, the concept of “intensity” applies within the domain of both the virtual and the actual.)

Let’s pause a moment to review the ground we’ve covered.

1) The modes of philosophical questioning characterizing German Idealism and “Deleuzism” (for want of a better term) proceed from two seemingly incompatible concepts of difference. Presumably, if we are to bring Schelling into productive dialogue with Deleuze, we will need to find some point of communication between these concepts.

2) The concept of difference formulated by Hegel and Schelling posits contradiction as the paradigmatic mode of relation between any two elements; it follows from this that relation will occur as a negation. The autopoiesis of the Absolute is truly, as Hegel says, a “labor of the negative.”

3) Deleuze objects to this concept of difference on at least three distinct counts. First, it subordinates difference to identity (by taking constituted identities as both the starting point and the secret “destination” of the dialectic). Secondly, the reduction of multiplicity to contradiction is, in at least some cases, an

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32 Deleuze, Bergsonism, p.97.
oversimplification that obscures important aspects of reality. Finally, “the negative,” taken as a complex of logical, ontological, ethical, and theological themes, seems uncomfortably complicit with the tendency toward reactivity and ressentiment diagnosed by Nietzsche.

4) Any alternative concept of difference, however, will have to be able to withstand the arguments used by Hegel to reduce multiplicity to contradiction in the first place. This is possible, provided we are willing to shift our focus from already constituted individuals (to which the Hegelian laws of determination-through-negation still apply) to preindividual phenomena.

5) Deleuze defines the preindividual field as a realm of intensive difference, in which the (energetic and/or ontological) differential between disparate components produces something new.

6) This production entails the transition between intensity and extensity: in their couplings intensities produce extensive space and phenomena, through processes of symmetry-breaking (of which well-known examples exist, both in geometry and in the natural world).

7) This genetic process tends to obscure itself, however, for the production of extensive quantities and qualities requires, as its energetic cost, the “canceling out” of intensive differences.

8) Any given genetic process occurs as the actualization of what was virtually enveloped in and as a constellation of singularities. Such actualization is what we have been calling individuation.

By now it is clear that—at least from the Deleuzian perspective—difference-as-negation
relates to intensive difference as its product or derivative, insofar as negation governs relations between types of entities or phenomena already produced and sustained by intensive differences. In general, I find this conclusion persuasive. On the other hand, we should not let the polemical tone of Deleuze’s arguments against contradiction and negativity blind us to the continuing relevance of these concepts for thinking about certain types of things and events. I would even go so far as to suggest that some problems require the resources of both concepts of difference.

Which brings us at last to Schelling, and to the *Ages of the World*, a text in which Schelling speaks both of intensity and of negation—which fact already suggests the use of a mixed hermeneutic such as the one I am proposing. More importantly, however, Schelling is narrating the events that take place upon the threshold of divine individuation. If, as I have argued above, difference-as-negation and difference-as-intensity find their legitimate objects within the regions of constituted (extensive) individuals and the preindividual intensive continuum, respectively, then we truly need both concepts to articulate these events as fully as possible.

### III. Metastable Being

Concluding our detour, we begin the next stage of the journey: not with Deleuze, nor even with Schelling, but rather with Simondon. Simondon’s thinking arises from one basic demand: To describe the process of individuation as it proceeds from a state of preindividuation, that is, without presupposing some constituted individual as the principle—as well as the result—of this process. In place of the traditional forms of explanation, he proposes that we think the individual

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33 An attitude exemplified by the claim that “Those formulae according to which ‘the object denies what it is not,’ or ‘distinguishes itself from everything that it is not,’ are logical monsters…in the service of identity” (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.49/70).
...as a relative reality, [as] a certain phase of being that presupposes a prior, pre-individual reality, and which even after individuation does not exist alone, for individuation does not exhaust all at once the potentials of pre-individual reality... .

This transformation of the concept of what it is to be an individual requires an equally dramatic transformation of the context in which individuation takes place. Hence the second part of Simondon’s diagnosis:

Individuation could not be adequately thought and described [in previous philosophical systems] because we knew only one form of equilibrium, stable equilibrium;...however, stable equilibrium excludes becoming, because it corresponds to the lowest possible level of potential energy....

We have known explicitly since the advent of thermodynamic theory that physical systems run on energetic differences. Think of the difference in temperature that powers a steam engine, or the distributions of chemical gradients that give rise to cellular differentiaction in an egg. Such differences (mostly intensive, as we might have guessed) are the rhythms governing the organization and disorganization of matter. We will discuss Simondon’s explanation of this fact momentarily; for now, let us note that a system at stable equilibrium is, by definition, a system that has “used up” the differences available to it, such that it produces no new effects—it ceases to become in any important way, and it certainly ceases to generate any new individuals. Where stable equilibrium is our model for understanding the behavior of physical (or ontological, or conceptual) systems, this will understandably impede the development of adequate accounts of individuation.

34 Simondon, Individuation, pp.24-25.
36 The example of the egg appears in Prigogine and Stengers, Order out of Chaos, pp.172-173.
37 Simondon’s account addresses phenomena of individuation in the inorganic, biological, psychical, and social domains; this extension of the theory is justified by perceived structural and operational isomorphisms between domains. To borrow the language used by some contemporary systems theorists, we might say that the dynamic of individuation described by Simondon is at least partially “substrate-independent”.
In place of this sterile stability, Simondon proposes the model of a metastable equilibrium. The basic image offered is that of a supersaturated solution which, under the right circumstances, leads to crystal formation. The model in its entirety, however, is somewhat more complex. We need first of all the concept of a system in general: the concept, let us say, of a (causal, material, formal, conceptual, energetic, and/or thematic) “belonging together” of phenomena within a given domain, such that these phenomena in their mutual interaction make up a kind of whole, however open. Given this type of experience, we require four further components for our construction of a concept of metastability: first, the concept of the potential energy of a system; second, the concept of immanently arising systemic order; third, the concept of entropy; and finally, the concept of the negentropic information of a system. Notice that each of these concepts refers to immanent or intrinsic aspects of a system’s behavior; they emerge in response to questions such as: What potential does the system contain? What properties of spatial and/or temporal self-structuration does it exhibit? Why do systems seem to “run out of steam”? Conversely, why doesn’t every system run out of steam in the way that we might expect?

This conceptual nexus gives rise, in Simondon’s thought, to the concept of metastability. Specifically, in attempting to explain the systemic capacity for self-structuration, to understand why this takes place, and to determine the nature of the result of this self-structuration (namely, an “individual”), Simondon concludes that individuating systems contain a systemic “disparation” [disparation], “two different dimensions, two disparate levels of reality, between which there is not yet any interactive communication.” The existence of this disparation poses a

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39 I say that these concepts refer to “intrinsic” aspects of the system, because each of these questions is easily circumvented by the positing of some external and/or transcendent action upon the system.
Precisely how does this process of individuation arise, and what does it entail? Looking again at the system, we see that it is also populated by singularities, that is, points of internal resonance between these coupled disparates. Under the right conditions, such resonance within and between singularities—and another word for resonance here is “information” (about which we will have more to say later)—is amplified, forming a feedback loop that in turn gives rise to new self-structuring activity on the part of the system.\textsuperscript{41} Individuation is the evolution of the system, via continued communication and passage of information between its coupled disparates (that is, between its singularities), so as to “integrate” these singularities “by organizing a new dimension in which they form a unique whole at a higher level”.\textsuperscript{42} The new system—that is, the individual—does not cancel these singularities (and the differences they imply), but rather holds them in mutual compatibility and compossibility. The individual thus both conserves and transforms the differential tensions characteristic of the original metastability.

Clearly even such a preliminary sketch as the foregoing demands a few examples. We’ll start with the phenomenon of crystal formation alluded to at the beginning of this section. A highly structured salt crystal will precipitate from a supersaturated solution—that is, a system in metastable equilibrium—in response to the systemic “problem” of achieving a minimal surface area and bonding energy for a given volume. Once crystal formation has begun, the existing seed or germ acts upon the still-amorphous field surrounding it (that is, the saline solution),

\textsuperscript{41} We can thus see how the principles of entropy and negentropy play a role in individuation (at least in the context of purely physical systems). The metastable system tries to “level out” the energetic differences between its coupled disparates; individuation occurs when, precisely in response to such entropic exigencies, the negentropic operation of self-organization arises.

\textsuperscript{42} Deleuze, “On Gilbert Simondon,” p.87.
communicating its structure to this field. In this example, the singularity at work is a structural relationship between intensive differences (pressure, temperature, energetic potential) in which the system’s distinctive problem—“Find the minimal surface area!”—inheres. Note the continued interaction between the constituted individual and the pre-individual field or system: the salt crystal continues to grow (that is, to individuate) just so long as it remains in communication with this field and the tensions responsible for its genesis.

A second, more complex example of individuation occurs within the domain of human vision. The disparate left- and right-eye images produced by the normal human visual apparatus are, in effect, two fractionally different perceptual universes, the difference of which poses a problem of coherence for the perceiving subject. Rather than sacrificing one of the two images, the visual operation solves this problem by “[grasping them] together as a system, [permitting] the formation of a unique ensemble…which integrates all elements, thanks to a new dimension,” that of depth. In this example, the problem posed by the “disparates” in question—these two non-overlapping images—finds its solution in the construction of something new: the perceptual world of depth. For the viewing subject, moreover, the information implicit in the original juxtaposition of incompatible or incompossible images becomes explicit (that is, meaningful) in the context of the perceptual system it has generated.

We’ll take our third example from the domain of human action. Examining the state of a

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43 The same effect can of course be achieved by “seeding” the solution with a pre-existing crystal; and indeed, individuation is sometimes prompted by the introduction of an extrinsic element into a system.
44 As Miguel DeLanda notes in *Intensive Science*, p.15), the “same” singularity can appear in different systemic contexts; thus a soap bubble will form, under other material-energetic conditions, in response to the same problem (that of minimizing surface area).
46 Between the first and second examples, the type of system in question has changed in kind: we have moved from a purely physico-chemical system to a perceptual one, with a corresponding transformation of the disparates, problems, and solutions (that is, individuations) involved. Note, also, that the result of an individuating operation need not be a separate (or separable) physically existing individual.
subject prior to action, Simondon finds that this subject is
captured between several worlds, between several orders; action is a discovery of
the significance of this disparation, of that whereby the particularities of each
ensemble are integrated into a richer and vaster one, possessed of a new
dimension.\textsuperscript{47}

But what are these disparate and competing worlds? The perspectival disparity posing the
problem is no longer that of the left eye versus the right eye, but rather that of the food-world
versus the sex-world versus the work-world versus..., worlds presenting demands, options, and
dangers that do not coincide, however slightly they may differ.\textsuperscript{48, 49} The trajectory of the action
ultimately taken in response to this difference—the directionality (in French, the \textit{sens}, that is,
“direction” and “sense” and “meaning”) of action—literally \textit{makes} the world in which this
multiplicity of possible objects and projects can “make sense” in their coexistence.\textsuperscript{50} Several
mutually inextricable individuations here unfold: the action is individuated, but so is a world—
and so too, of course, is the acting subject.\textsuperscript{51}

Our fourth and final example comes from Simondon’s analysis of organic spatio-
temporality. According to his claim, the properties of living matter follow the exigencies of
maintaining, even more than systemic energetic and structural conditions, certain \textit{topological}
conditions—of which the partitioning of an “inside” and an “outside” is the most important.\textsuperscript{52}
(Even the greater topological complexity of pluricellular organisms represents not an erasure but
rather an elaboration upon and complication of this primitive distinction.) More daringly, he

\begin{scriptsize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Simondon, \textit{Individuation}, p.211.
\item Simondon, \textit{Individuation}, p.212.
\item Nowadays the ubiquity of the personal computer makes this experience a familiar one for many people: as a
primary locus of work, communication, and entertainment, the computer tacitly offers up to us a plurality of
possible worlds.
\item In such a circumstance, an ethical principle such as the Kantian imperative could conceivably play the role of
singularity.
\item Needless to say, not every action succeeds in its aim, that is, solves the problem it embodies; the domain of
action is as littered with partial or abortive individuations as any other domain.
\item Simondon, \textit{Individuation}, p.225.
\end{enumerate}
\end{scriptsize}
proposes that, upon the edge of the partition, topology and chronology tend to collapse into a topochronological schema that forms the “first dimensionality” of the living being.\footnote{Simondon, Individuation, p.228.} This means that

every topological characteristic has a chronological correlate…; thus the fact, for the living substance, of being interior to the selective polarized membrane signifies that this substance has been caught in the condensed past. The fact that a substance is in the exterior milieu signifies that this substance can still “happen to” \([\textit{advenir}]\), be assimilated by, or damage the living individual: it is \textit{to come}, futural \([\textit{à venir}]\)\footnote{Simondon, Individuation, p.228.}.

This means, however, that the membrane itself comprises not simply a \textit{spatial}, but also a \textit{temporal} threshold: for Simondon the membrane is nothing less than a confrontation of (interior) past and (exterior) future, and “this confrontation, [occurring] as the operation of selective assimilation, \textit{is} the present of the living individual.”\footnote{Simondon, Individuation, p.228.} Temporally speaking, that is, the present—and the membrane or limit that embodies it—\textit{is itself individuated} from out of this metastable coupling of past and future. We live the “now” liminally, on the surfaces of our bodies and the edges of our thoughts.

IV. \textit{Die Weltalter: A Divine Prehistory}\footnote{The following analysis will focus upon the third draft on the grounds that this version captures most vividly the tensions of the dynamic of divine individuation.}

In the introduction to his translation of the third (1815) draft of the \textit{Ages of the World}, Jason Wirth characterizes Schelling’s God as (a) being that “cannot become equal to itself or represent itself to itself because the very condition of divine expenditure is that it must eternally
become disequal to itself.” Unequal, constitutively dis-equilibrated being: Schelling’s God, the hen kai pan—the field or system within which any creaturely individuation will unfold—is the metastable system par excellence. As I hope to show in the following analysis, the unfolding dynamic of divine becoming narrated in the Ages of the World resonates strongly with the structure of individuation presented by Simondon. What is most of interest here, however, is not the fact of such resonance, however unexpected it might be, but rather the possibility that this confrontation or disparative coupling between the Schellingian and Simondonian systems could produce something rather new: an “inkling” [Ahnung] (as Schelling would say) concerning the genesis of the conditions and structures of individuation itself, and the role played by love therein.

In particular, returning to our earlier discussion of difference, I would like to show how the individuation of the divine being from out of the metastable field comprises a movement from an intensive disparation to a state in which the dynamic of negation becomes possible. I will argue, moreover, that the intensive beginnings of being linger even after the system has begun to manifest this other type of difference.

My discussion of the text will unfold in several distinct stages. I shall begin with a description of the initial state of the system, showing how it manifests its metastability in the form of a distinctive problem; I will describe the process of individuation from out of the coupling of freedom and necessity; finally, I will attempt to pinpoint the nature and function of

58 Unexpected, not only because Schelling was writing prior to the formulation of at least two of the four “prerequisites” for an adequate concept of metastability and individuation (viz., entropy and negentropy), but also in light of Simondon’s own critique of “dialectical” accounts of individuation. According to Simondon, dialectic’s failure fully to critique the notion of substance, and its resulting latent substantialism, restricts it to an inadequate concept of individuation (Individuation, p.553). Simondon’s critique of “dialectic in general” appears to have its basis primarily in a caricatured reading of Hegel, however, which greatly detracts from its force.
love in this process.

*Concerning certain narrative exigencies*

Freedom and necessary nature *are* actually always already (coming) together. This is what it means for the world to exist; this is the precondition for space, time, and matter. Throughout the first part of the *Ages of the World*, however, Schelling writes as though this were *not* the case—as though necessary nature existed in a time prior to this coming together, and, unavoidably, as though the coming-together of necessity and freedom were itself an event occurring in time. Why such a potentially misleading narrative choice?

Schelling’s motivations here go beyond the requirements of a gripping narrative (*Will divine nature ever resolve its deadlock? Will God ever become a Person?*—although we already know that the answer to these questions is *yes*, we need to forget this knowledge to enjoy fully the drama of this story), and even beyond the challenge of expressing logical priority in the language of temporal succession. Our finite nature dictates that we can know the divine “in no other way than in relation to nature that is eternally subordinated to God”; 59 if we are to understand more fully the ongoing “synthesis” of necessary nature and freedom, therefore, we must begin from the side of nature. But the latter exists, in relation to God, in the mode of temporal dislocation, posited as an “eternal past”, that is, a past that was never present, but that coexists every present as it passes. The first part of the *Ages of the World* aims to describe both this persisting fragment of the preindividual field *and* how it came to be posited as eternally past. This means writing *from the point of view* of eternally past nature; and, from this very special point of view, the coupling of nature and freedom is always still-to-come.

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The preindividual field of divine nature

Let the starting point be a theological commonplace (for Schelling’s contemporaries, if not for us): Everyone knows that God is “infinite Love”. What “everyone” does not know, what everyone tries to avoid knowing, is that Love, even and especially Infinite Love, lacks ontological self-sufficiency; “being” is not included in its definition.60 For being—in the sense of existence—is not a passive property accruing indifferently to any old thing. Be-ing is a verb; and what that verb names is first of all a process that proceeds centripetally, recoiling back upon itself to create a well of gravity. Being is the process whereby a being, any being, condenses into existence. It’s as though existence were so precarious that the first move had to be one of self-consolidation. Schelling’s premise is simple: to be is first of all to consolidate one’s being.

Love, however—especially an infinite Love unadulterated with any other components—seems to say the opposite of being: Love does not “seek its own”61 or return to itself, but flows forth irrepresibly. It moves not to stabilize its own being, but to squander itself upon its other(s). Love is not an agent, capable of performing and undergoing many different sorts of actions whilst retaining its identity: if Love moves otherwise than “lovingly”—if, for example, it turns upon itself to confirm its own existence—in that very movement it becomes other than itself. Love is thus like one of those elements that occurs naturally only in compound form, never in isolation; love can exist only when coupled with or shadowed by the movement of be-ing.

In affirming the coexistence of two principles in the divine nature—“the outpouring, outstretching, self-giving being, and an equivalently eternal force of selfhood, of retreat into itself, of Being in itself”62—Schelling has already stated the premise for everything that will

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62 Schelling, Ages of the World, p.6/211.
follow. Or has he?

In order to explain the coexistence of these antithetical principles (about which we will shortly have more to say), Schelling invokes a second distinction: that between Being [Seyn] and “what-is” or “that which has being” [das Seyende]. At first glance this distinction seems simply to follow from the movement of be-ing already described, in which self-consolidation would produce both “something” that has being, and the being which (presumably) this “something” has. This leaves open, however, the question of why be-ing happens in this way: what necessity governs this recoil?

Schelling’s own characterization of the distinction will help us here. Seyn and das Seyende do not relate antithetically in the manner of Love and Being, since that which allows for the existence of contradiction cannot itself be a contradiction. Instead, the difference seems to be one of ontological intensity: das Seyende “is” to a higher power (where “power” denotes both intensity and efficacy) than mere Seyn. To be in the mode of mere being is, in point of fact, to be as das Nichtseyende, or “that which does not have being.” Schelling hastens to point out that the “Being which has no being” is not equivalent to non-Being or nothingness; he invokes, instead, the Greek category of the me on, concerning which Wirth notes that “the force of me does not negate being, but rather suspends the authority of its presence.” Recall the fourth example given in the previous discussion of Simondon, in which the structure of a living individual expresses a chrono-topological differentiation: if the membrane itself, the threshold of interior and exterior, is the site upon and to which something becomes present (“presents” or “presences” itself) to the living individual, then the status of that which lies to either side of the membrane

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65 Jason Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and His Time* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp.184-185. My interpretation of the status of the me on in this particular context (that is, at this moment of divine ontogenesis) diverges somewhat from Wirth’s.
could be well be described as a kind of *me on*. To be merely Being is, at the very least, not to be present, not explicitly to act or be actualized. The point, however, is that neither *Seyn* nor *das Seyende* possesses full ontological consistency; in their necessary coupling they figure instead the *inconsistency*—the disparity, the constitutive problem—of Being.

Let’s say, then, that being *qua* being differs intensively in this way; in that case, the two principles of divine nature—the movement of love, and the movement constitutive of *a* being—emerge as products of this differential coupling. As our earlier discussion of intensive difference would suggest, such principles arise spontaneously within the pre-individual field, in response to its constitutive (and problematic) disparity. In its articulation in and as two determinate and opposed principles the system of being has already begun the process of transforming its intensive disparation into a set of complex, “extensive” relations. We have not yet reached this point of resolution, however, for neither the principle of love nor that of being (let’s call them A and B, respectively) has yet attained the status of an individual. In truth, they are not so much distinct entities as energetic fluctuations or opaque flashes of impulse and directionality, like currents in the void.

Now, the systemic problem has been posed in a very specific way: it is a struggle for dominance. If the expansive and contractive principles comprise different options for the development of the divine system, then to be *das Seyende* means, first of all, to be the dominant “program” for such development. Will the system expand or contract? What, if anything, will it produce, and what shall be the mode(s) of such production(s)? To be that which has being, and so to act determinatively upon the system, means simultaneously to subordinate incompatible principles or programs. Presumably this problem would find its solution in the conclusive ascendancy of one of the principles.
But like a myth, or a mathematical problem with more than one solution, the divine narrative contains its own variants. Strictly speaking, it’s undecidable whether the intensive differential of *Seyn* and *das Seyende* will generate a linear flow (expansive A) or a feedback loop (contractive B): both are constitutive possibilities for the system, and thus there must be at least two versions of the coupling of A and B—each a singularity in its own right—depending upon whether the expansive or the contractive tendency takes precedence.

And the situation is still more complex! In each of these new singularities—or “potencies” [*die Potenz*], as Schelling names them—the structural relationship between the principles expresses a fundamental *inability* of either to function independently of its relationship to the other. We know already that love—expansive-donative A—requires a “force of selfhood,”66 viz., being; but it turns out that being—contractive-repressive B—stands equally in need something to contract and repress. The purity of either principle is wholly imaginary, for love and being are co-constitutive. And it is this tacit relationship between the two that is made explicit in the *third* and final potency. In the third version of the divine myth, the potencies are held together in their difference. To the extent that it attempts to integrate existing singularities, this third potency already has the character of a more sophisticated attempt at individuation. This initial attempt fails, however; the third potency *cannot* resolve the problem posed by the other two, and simply takes its place alongside them, yet another structural-energetic singularity within the system.

\[ A_1, A_2, A_3 \]: the field of divine individuation known as “the nature of God” or “necessity” exists67 as this network or constellation of singularities (governed respectively by the contractive

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67 To use a highly problematic term!
principle, the expansive principle, and the systemic tendency toward unity). Each is coupled to
the other two, but nothing comes of their difference, for no potency retains dominance long
enough to initiate a determinate direction for further individuation within the field. After all, in
this “jostling between the necessity and the impossibility to be”\textsuperscript{68} each potency “has fully the
same claim…to be that which has being. Not one of them can bring itself by nature only to Being
or not to be that which has being.”\textsuperscript{69} The potencies therefore circulate with infinite velocity, like
the blades of a propeller, blurring into a nimbus in which nothing distinctly “is,” and everything
seems to hover in the limbo of not-yet- and no-longer-having-being. In this way, the problem
originating in the ontological disparation, and posed in terms of dominance, is perpetually
defered—but never resolved.\textsuperscript{70}

\textit{The Godhead, Part I: Ontological Degree 0- \( \infty \)}

We know already, however, that this is not the whole story; it’s only a flashback. (What
comes next, the description of divine freedom, will also be a partial account, speaking as though
the Godhead had not yet encountered the system of nature. But, whereas for nature the “not yet”
stemmed from nature’s status as eternally past, for freedom the “not yet” indicates a boundless
futural reserve: never will the coming-to-being of the Godhead have exhausted its pure freedom,
neutrality, indifference.)

In the larger scheme of things, the field or system comprised by divine nature is not
closed, but rather opens upon something outside of and other to it: divine freedom, or the

\textsuperscript{68} Schelling, \textit{Ages of the World}, p.13/220.
\textsuperscript{69} Schelling, \textit{Ages of the World}, p.11/218.
\textsuperscript{70} The logical order of this emergent movement arises from the respective characters of the potencies involved.
Although each has an equal \textit{claim} to be that which has being, each also has, by virtue of its dominant principle,
a different degree of inclination toward \textit{actually} being that which has being. In other words, although this initial
configuration does not resolve the tensions of the problematic field, it does structure it in a way that prefigures
the genuine individuation to follow.
Godhead (die Gottheit). The Godhead is simultaneously ontological degree 0 in its utter “lack of potency,” and degree ∞ in its excess to all modalities of being available within the confines of nature (the Godhead “is above all nothingness because it itself is everything”).

It isn’t mere Being [Seyn], but neither is it that which has being [das Seyende], nor even that which does not have being [das Nichtseyende], instead, it is only “the eternal freedom to be.” And, as such, the Godhead is truly asubjective—for to be a subject is first of all to be subject to Being, to bear the weight of the imperative, “Be!”

Yes, the Godhead is above all pure freedom. Tipping the description forward to the imminent emergence of the divine Person, Schelling explains that this pure freedom is like “the will that wills nothing”—the language of “will” marking the threshold between the asubjective and the subjective, the degree 0 (and degree ∞) of subjectivity. Such freedom or will gives us “the affirmative concept of absolute eternity,” for it is “that which exceeds all time, as eternal immovability.” Splendidly null, impassive, unperturbed by the faintest tremor of desire, the Godhead is that which persists beyond the energetic economies of both being and subjectivity.

As creatures situated within these economies, we truly desire (says Schelling) nothing other than the Godhead, and rightly so, since the latter is “not so much as something good as the Good itself.” And certainly the system of necessary nature has shown itself incapable of solving its own constitutive problems—it needs help from outside. But this desire and need

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74 Cf. Schelling, Ages of the World, pp.23-24/234-235. Schelling alludes to the etymology of the word Subjekt as a reminder that subject on to another (in his view, something higher) is built into the very concept of subjectivity.
appear unrequited, and consequently doomed to remain unfulfilled: for why would the pure-freedom-to-be ever entangle itself with nature? Furthermore (assuming such entanglement somehow occurred), would pure freedom not lose, in its very act of self-surrender to nature, its own nature as pure freedom? And yet, the existence of the world and everything in it confirms the fact of this improbable entanglement. What we need to clarify is both the why and the how of this logic-defying event.

Or at any rate the how—for we must admit that our answer to the why can only be a non-answer. There can be no question of ascribing motives (however obscure) to an indifferent will, or of bending pure freedom to the yoke of sufficient reason. At most we can reiterate what we already know, that the Godhead and nature have been tacitly coupled all along. (Schelling suggests that the Godhead posits “immediately, and without any movement, but precisely through [its] purity, that Other [viz., nature] that is Being to God”; God’s Nature would then be the necessary complement to the Godhead, a sort of side effect of freedom.) But the Godhead’s active affirmation of its link to nature, its recognition of this nature as its own, remains inscrutable. (Perhaps because, as we’ll soon see, this decision in favor of being is always ongoing.)

About the how we can fortunately say rather more. The system of divine nature runs on the intensive differences it multiplies and conjugates with all the force of necessity; but in truth the greatest difference has always lain not between two intensities of being (a difference that now

79 For Slavoj Žižek, this problem of the Godhead’s engagement with Nature is of particular interest as a barometer of Schelling’s thought over the course of the *Weltalter* period, since the solution given to this problem differs between the first, second, and third surviving *Weltalter* drafts. Žižek reproaches the Schelling of the third draft for taking as his point of departure the already-established co-existence of nature and freedom (whereas in earlier drafts, freedom precedes being, and “contracts” it, either through necessity [first draft] or freely [second draft]). Cf. Slavoj Žižek and F.W.J. Schelling, *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, translated by Judith Norman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp.34-35.
appears secondary and derivative) but between necessary Being and its other. What differs most from necessary Being? It can be only that which alone eludes the imperative “to be”—not non-being (which is itself simply one intensive zone within the field of necessity), but rather the utter suspension of this imperative and the noose of necessity it articulates: “the pure freedom to be,” or (in energetico-materialist terms) ontological degree $0\sim\infty$. The divine system will find the individuating force it requires in the intensive difference between nature and freedom.

*The Godhead, Part II: Necessity and desire*

From our standpoint, the coupling of nature and freedom would certainly require at least one paradoxical component. We’ve seen that the problem compelling the preindividual field to individuate arises precisely from the imperative “to be”; the system needs to decide how it will respond to this imperative, and. as Schelling makes clear, each of the mutually incompossible singularities or proto-individuals named “potencies” has an equal claim to be the solution. In other words, the economy of the system depends upon necessity for its force. So what will become of it when the force of necessity is itself suspended?

The answer lies in a reformulation of the problem, one that transforms the economy of necessity into an economy of desire. Let’s see what happens to the potencies on the threshold of the (eternally) past tense:

…in that eternally commencing life there lies the wish to escape from the involuntary movement and from the distress of pining *[die Drangsal]*. And through its simple presence, without any movement (since it is still pure conation *[Wollen]* itself), that which is higher, magically, so to speak, rouses in that life the yearning *[das Sehnen]* for freedom. The obsession *[Sucht]* abates into yearning *[Sehnsucht]*, wild desire *[Begierde]* turns into a yearning to ally itself, as if it were its own true or highest self, with the will that wills nothing, with eternal
This reaction hinges entirely upon a kind of intrinsic desire now seen to have been animating the system all along, a wild desire [Begierde]—desire for what? Desire to be, to be that which has being. From the point of view of the potencies, what we have elsewhere called an imperative occurs as desire, one of the most primitive desires imaginable. Is Schelling here imputing a subjective comportment to that which is pre-subjective? Perhaps, but not (I believe) illegitimately: this type of isomorphism cuts both ways, and we could as easily claim that human desire is merely one specialized manifestation of what is first of all an ontological affect or tendency: being implies a tendency—and why not name this tendency “desire”?—to be.

The potencies have hitherto experienced the imperative or desire to be, and to be to the highest degree, that is, to be das Seyende, that which has being: this ontological obsession has kept them locked in their cycle of thwarted individuation, unable either to consummate or to renounce their desire. What now occurs is a transformation of desire. Here we must think as simultaneous the events described sequentially by Schelling. For if necessarily desiring nature also longs to escape the cycle of necessity (i.e., if it desires to desire differently, or to escape its own movement), it is because the exposure to what lies beyond necessity is already permitting the formerly univocal movement of necessity-desire (Eros-Ananke) to dissent from itself, to differentiate within and turn against itself—such that desire simultaneously discovers its

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81 Why not grant, further, that necessity as such is in some sense erotic? In *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, translated by Tim Parks (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), Roberto Calasso presents a persuasive case for the kinship of eros and ananke in the ancient Greek tradition. Each constitutes a binding, be it a kiss or a knot. For the Olympians, “the two imprisoning nets are the same; what has changed [in the transition from Ananke to Eros] is the aesthetic appearance” (p.100; cf. pp.97-101 for the full discussion of this issue). Perhaps one of the most significant ways in which subsequent Western thinkers diverged from this archaic Greek inheritance was to begin to conceive of the Good—and, by extension, its allies, Love and the Beautiful—as separable from and potentially antagonistic toward the Necessary; Calasso names Plato as the initiator of this divergence (pp.114-115).
difference from and antagonism toward necessity. The same movement toward the outside articulates an alternative object of desire (a desire now qualified as “yearning” [das Sehnen])\(^2\): no longer being, but freedom. Finally, contrary to the modus operandi of desire-as-necessity, the yearning for freedom yearns not for appropriation of its object (as was the case with the desire for being), but rather for an alliance [mit der ewigen Freiheit sich...zu verbünden]; and this is because it seems to recognize freedom as somehow already more its “own” than the being it has struggled to claim: freedom appears before the system of divine nature as that system’s own true “self”.

A decentering of the system has occurred. “To (desire to) be” is, in a certain sense, to desire to be one’s (own) self, making auto-confirmation the constitutive movement of being. In recognizing the Godhead as its “true self”, the system of nature escapes its obsession with being, for the self for which it now yearns turns out to have literally nothing to do with being: this self cannot be constituted, affirmed, or claimed through auto-confirmation. But if the selfhood (more neutrally: the functional consistency) of the system up till now has accreted around the problem of being, then the recognition of the Godhead as self entails re-articulation of the problem, which is no longer being, but freedom.

Here we have a preliminary answer to the first of the paradoxes described above. We had wondered whether and how a system governed by necessity could function once necessity had ceased to hold sway; would the intensive field not disintegrate or subside into equilibrium, once deprived of its structuring problematic? Now we see that necessity’s motive role is taken up and

\(^2\) The use of four different terms to express desire or longing (das Begierde, das Sehnen, das Sucht, and das Sehnsucht) is less a rigorous technical distinction, I believe, than a means of expressing both the different nuances of desire (for example, das Sucht—“obsession” or “addiction”—conveys well the sense of the persistent and insatiable desire that incessantly circles its unattainable object), and the successive transformations or refinements undergone by that desire as it diverges from necessity.
transformed by desire. Furthermore, and not coincidentally, this new dynamic is in fact better suited to the new problem (the problem of freedom) that is simultaneously articulated.

V. Onto-gensis

Information, Part 1: Broken symmetries

The Godhead, in its neutral vicinity to the system of nature, has disrupted the authority of necessity; or, better put, we see now that the system of necessity has all along been only part of a larger divine system. Necessity only works in its exposure to that which exceeds and escapes necessity; only the difference between necessity and freedom will suffice to produce a genuine individuation. (Which is to say that the problem of being is insufficient in itself to require the creation of the world, or of a self, for its solution.)

What happens now? --Although we have used spatial and temporal terms in our earlier descriptions of the system of nature, the truth is that there was no space, or time, under this regime: in their desire to be as intensely as possible, the potencies were contracted like an infinitely small and dense black hole from which no thing could escape. The decentering of the system’s “self”, however, has relocated the systemic center of gravity (so to speak) outside of the system—at which point the black hole turns inside-out, flowering forth into a very different reality.

First of all, the three potencies come to relate to each other in an unprecedented manner. Their earlier strife followed the binary logic of self/non-self and Seyn/Seyend; to A₁ (for example) the difference between A₂ and A₃ made no difference, since it negated each of them equally by virtue of not being them. (Here is one case in which an intensive difference plays out
in terms of negativity.) Now, however, the potencies relax into a more subtly differentiated hierarchy, in which the $A_3$, the indifferent unity of the two other potencies, is drawn away from the others and toward the Godhead. The longing for freedom also assigns distinct roles to the other two potencies, based not upon dominance but upon communication, that is, the transmission of information.

Let’s talk for a moment about information, a concept the current relevance of which derives from its privileged position in Simondon’s theory of individuation. We have already noted Simondon’s complaint that the traditional concepts of form illegitimately presuppose the very process of individuation they are supposed to explain. The concept of information, in contrast, seems adequately to fulfill the functions traditionally delegated to form, without suffering from the latter’s deficiencies. Like form, information allows us to understand the emergence, transmission, reproduction, and evolution of complex structures in a wide variety of material and energetic contexts; unlike form, however, information does not presuppose or require the introduction into matter of something entirely other to it, does not operate solely through self-replication, and need not remain a fixed quantity within a given system: under the proper circumstances, a relatively simple “message” can evolve to a high level of complexity.  

Nicolis and Prigogine offer a succinct definition of the prerequisites for information. Taking the experience of reading a text as their point of departure, they describe two essential conditions for the transmission of information:

1. A sharp symmetry breaking in space, owing to which…possible issues of the

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83 As (for example) in the development of a human being from conception to adulthood: from the limited and primitive communications between and within two simple cells emerges a system comprising both increasingly complex exchanges of information, and the material components allowing for such exchanges—specialized cells, sense organs, a brain and a central nervous system—to say nothing of the symbolic transactions occurring within a human community.
reading process are continuously eliminated….

2. An element of unpredictability, associated with the revealing of an object of a message that the reader could not infer to begin with.\(^{84}\)

With respect to the first condition: We cannot read a blank page, and we would face great—perhaps insurmountable—difficulties in reading a text which followed no consistent protocol of spatial organization (if, for example, the words were scattered randomly across the page). Now, a page upon which words are arranged consistently in rows running from left to right has considerably less symmetry,\(^{85}\) and greater order, than one upon which the words are randomly scattered: hence the claim that the transmission of information requires symmetry breaking (and the correlative tendency towards greater order).

Yet it’s not just a question of greater order, as the second condition confirms. The sequence of characters “ABCDEFG ABCDEFG [through \(n\) reiterations]” is certainly more orderly than the sequence, “The past is known, the present is discerned, the future is intimated,” inasmuch as we can infer the global structure of the first sequence from the knowledge of the part we possess,\(^{86}\) whereas the second sequence permits no such inference, at least not \(a\ priori\).\(^ {87}\) But of the two sequences, the second is clearly richer in information, precisely because of its unpredictability: its full meaning is not analytically contained within any one of its parts, but

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\(^{85}\) Symmetry refers here to the number of transformations a given spatial configuration may undergo while remaining basically unaltered. So, for example, in Euclidean geometry a circle has greater symmetry than a parallelogram; a human face is said to be symmetrical when its left-right orientation could be “flipped” with little or no alteration in appearance; and finally, a text in which the words can be rearranged or connected in any order whatsoever without alteration to its meaning has greater symmetry than one following the conventions of standard written English.


\(^{87}\) It is theoretically possible, for example, that the second sequence—the opening sentence of the *Ages of the World*—is really just part of a chain of symbols produced by an algorithm, but we could never know this with certainty save in retrospect, and in light of our knowledge of the entire text. Moreover, as Nicolis and Prigogine themselves point out, the discovery that a text was algorithm-dependent would change our evaluation of what in the text “counts” as information (*Exploring Complexity*, p.186).
inheres globally.

One final note: as the example of reading makes particularly clear, the transmission of information implies temporal *irreversibility* (which means a breaking of temporal symmetry as well): as suggested by the etymology of the word, information successfully transmitted always effects an irreversible alteration, however small.

Returning now to the new relationship between the potencies, we can assume that, if the system is to evolve, some transmission of information is required, in and through the three factors just mentioned; and indeed, this is precisely what we find. In their contracted state, the potencies have little or nothing to communicate amongst themselves; it’s the attunement of the system to its exterior that generates a richer flow of information. We could say, in fact, that the yearning of the system in response to its apperception of the exterior is itself the first true message, articulating the differentiation of desire from necessity. In its passage this information changes the system irrevocably, cracking open the “world-egg”88 of the potencies’ self-reiteration and exposing them to the outside. Thus, for all its simplicity, this affective signal is profoundly rich in information—it discovers and creates for itself the very possibility of the new and the unpredictable! On the side of increasing order, meanwhile, symmetry breaks: the circle dehisces into a tripartite hierarchy89 in which “up” and “down” have meaning for the first time.90 These breaks proliferate throughout the system, and within each potency, the differential coupling of principles intensifies so that “what is similar to the higher elevates itself but…what is less similar to it…is cast down and lowered into the depths.”91 Schelling’s name for this amplification of

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intensive distance, die Scheidung, expresses well this division whereby an intensive proto-space changes in kind.

We cannot properly speak of temporal irreversibility, since we remain within time’s prehistory; all the same, the Scheidung has sliced into the ourobourotic regime, and on the near side of the cut we will witness soon enough the unspooling of a linear concatenation.

*Information, Part II: Decision, time, matter*

World exists because Freedom holds Being in an insubstantial and irresistible embrace. Or, as Schelling says, “the Godhead recognizes in nature its own eternal nature and is from now on, albeit free with respect to nature…, nonetheless inseparable from it.”92 The net of necessary being would be too tight to let any thing through,93 were it not for its intersections with freedom: world happens in the interstices of contingency perpetually springing up at these points of intersection.

But we need to back up a few steps. Earlier, we asked what it would take to bring about fully-fledged individuation(s) within the system of nature. What we now learn (in the discussion leading up to the assumption of nature by being)94 is that the potencies, each of which had initially seemed to express an abortive solution to the problem of being, actually comprise the elements of a single solution (that is, a single world-individual). As we already know, each potency is a differential coupling with its own problem to solve; now Schelling informs us that the tension between contractive and expansive principles could successfully individuate the potencies (which in the circuit of eternal nature seemed doubtful)—but only when more

93 “By virtue of the simple necessity of its nature (this is proven), actual existence never occurs either in God itself or outside of God” (Schelling, *Ages of the World*, p.27/239).
intricately coupled to the principles of the other potencies within the hierarchy.

This is true, at least, of the two lower potencies, $A_1$ and $A_2$, each of which resolves its problem through linkage with its immediate superior. The problem lies with the highest potency, $A_3$. In the first attunement to freedom, the third potency rose *naturally* to the highest and outermost boundary of the system. As a partial integration of the other structural singularities, it’s the most sophisticated product of the system;\(^{95}\) in fact, this integration of disparates makes it a kind of proto-subjectivity. As the opening of necessary being upon its exterior, $A_3$ is the film or membrane upon which something like self-consciousness will emerge. In itself, however, it manifests the limit of the system’s capacities for individuation, and its constitutive tension cannot simply be deferred to another part of the system—in order for it to solve its own problems, $A_3$ will need the help of that which lies beyond the system.

Freedom must *come to being*. But how does the Godhead “take on” Being, how could such a thing occur? Schelling compares this event to a lightning flash,

> …for it is embodied [*inbegriffen*] as a happening without actually (*explicite*) being something that happened. This resolution [*Ent-Schließung*], coming out of the innermost unity, is only comparable to that incomprehensible primordial act in which the freedom of a person is decided for the first time.\(^{96}\)

Were this resolution “something that happened” it would be merely another scrap of punctuation scattered along the sentence of time, one of many landmarks in the syntax of a life or an era. But we are still only on the threshold of time: nothing can really have happened yet. (To say nothing of the fact that a pure irruption of freedom *within* time would obliterate any and every temporal grammar.) The conjugation of Nature and the Godhead has never, will never *have happened*; but

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\(^{95}\) “For the eternal nature attained its summit in that being… [The] boundary between nature and freedom, between the natural and the supernatural, is here” (Schelling, *Ages of the World*, p.37/252).

it is always happening: in fact, it is the temporal threshold itself.

The sole analogue to this inaugural decision or resolution is simultaneously close to us and unimaginably distant, foreign: it is the event of personal individuation in which we freely choose the “character” that will henceforth bind us with strictest necessity. Character is not a set of qualities selected and put on like a new coat. Rather, it is like the light produced by the sun, a coalescence of effects given off by a constant process: decision. The tricky part, as Schelling has already explained in the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, is that it is only this lived residue of character-effects—never the ongoing event of their production—that appears within consciousness’ inventory.\(^{97}\) Thus, to claim (as Schelling does) that the decision-event is free is to say that freedom is not a possession or property of human consciousness, and scarcely an object of human experience: instead, it is the event of this consciousness’ perpetual awakening-to-itself, or its continuous individuation.\(^{98}\)

In just this way, the Godhead never finishes its coming-to-being; it remains “supremely free”\(^{99}\) despite its involvement with being, since this involvement is itself the event of freedom from which all individuation incessantly flows forth.

This event includes the shape of each present moment in its gathering and dispersal; for time—the time in which fully-fledged individuation can occur—*starts here*. The Godhead’s decision in favor of being is the first genuinely irrevocable and irreversible event; it consolidates the spatial scission of the potencies, but does so only in the opening of an unprecedented

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\(^{98}\) This is no less true of divine consciousness. Divine consciousness, which operates in this mode of decision, has the eternal past as its unconscious, and itself consists “exclusively of the act of the dawning of consciousness” (Schelling, *Ages of the World*, pp.44-45/262-263).

temporal modality of existence. In the moment of decision, the first system of nature “is posited as an eternal past, as a past that did not first become past, but which was the past from the primordial beginning and since all eternity.”

From this three consequences follow. In the first place, for those of us “in” time, temporal symmetry has always already shattered, and the decision of freedom in favor of being—though still ongoing—appears as having always already happened: the decision comes to us only across time, like light from a distant star. In the second place, and from a different point of view, the shattering of temporal symmetry is ongoing; the decision is the perpetual splitting of nature upon the threshold of the present moment, dislocating or doubling it back to form the eternal past. Hence, in the third place, the being of the eternal past differs in kind from that of a past that was formerly present. The eternal past does not so much pre-exist the present, as co-exist it, implicated or enveloped within it. More exactly, it persists as “prime matter”: a process transposed from infinite speed to glacial slowness, and thereby present no longer as process, but as the substance upon and through which other, faster processes will henceforth run their course. Thus the opening of time also implies the beginnings of materiality.

Temporalization and materialization: these are, in general, the conditions under which

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101 Let us for now simply note the resonance between this account and the Bergsonian definition taken up by Deleuze: “There is...a ‘past in general’ that is not the particular past of a particular present but is...eternal and for all time, the condition of the ‘passage’ of each particular present” (Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p.56).
102 “Therefore that dark, inscrutable, and inexpressible being becomes the All [i.e., the Being of God] in a subjugation and cision that does not happen once and for all, but in a moment that is eternally, always, and still happening” (Schelling, *Ages of the World*, p.29/242).
103 “This prime matter must be conceived not as having been since eternity, but rather only as having become so in the eternal movement through subjugation and debasement” (Schelling, *Ages of the World*, p.30/242).
104 Schelling characterizes this transition as equivalent to death (*Ages of the World*, pp.43-44/261). The idea of a difference in speed appears in Simondon, who suggests that the duality of life and inert matter might result from the operation of two speeds of individuation upon a single prevital, prephysical reality (*Individuation*, p.236).
105 Not that all natural substance is “material” in the everyday sense of the word; the system of nature encompasses “spiritual” substance as well.
full individuation can take place. Alone, the system of nature could find no solution to the problem of Being. When the latter is reformulated as the problem of freedom, a solution (individuation) becomes possible, but not through a simple synthesis of the potencies: the Godhead’s embrace is simultaneously a fracture or folding—\textit{de-cision}—that will henceforth run through every moment and every thing. This scission of being does not show itself crisply and distinctly in the space-time of which it is the origin; it is not localizable because it engenders every locality—it is the crack through which everything pours, the umbilicus of every event. Though we see its effects through the movements around it, this ongoing entwinement of being and freedom is itself indiscernible, and we can clearly see or know a thing only when it has slipped over to the near side, the side of being. But everything has always been happening right at this indiscernible fold. This fold \textit{is} the now, the “eternal birth into Being” of God.\textsuperscript{106}

\textit{Information, Part III: Virtual Nature}

--By Schelling’s own admission, we haven’t even begun to hear the \textit{real} story; like divine nature itself, we’ve been mired in eternity, every apparent beginning only a further addition to a burgeoning back-story. Not that Schelling is an incompetent narrator—quite the contrary. It’s eternity itself that stumbles and stutters along its path of self-articulation. And so even now, when the curtain quivers in readiness to rise upon the opening scene of history (the “actual history that we intended to describe, the narrative of that series of free actions through which God, since eternity, decided to reveal itself”\textsuperscript{107}), something else must happen first, almost like a pantomime of the action to come.

We’ve seen that, in its exposure to freedom, the system of nature gives rise to and is

\textsuperscript{106} Schelling, \textit{Ages of the World}, p.50/269.
\textsuperscript{107} Schelling, \textit{Ages of the World}, p.49/269.
transformed by a flow of information, a revolutionary message enacting desire’s fission from necessity. The potencies settle into mutually interconnected strata: the infinitely dense point dilates into a *spatium*. Yet, in a way, this transformation only intensifies the challenges besetting nature. The reorientation of nature toward freedom entailed that each stratum now envelop the maximum distance or greatest intensive difference possible between its constitutive principles; how, then, will the potencies achieve the connection and integration that alone will solve their problem?

History itself will unfold as the slow solution of this ontological calculus. *Before* history, however—in the instant or aeon between the cision and history—comes the pantomime.

It’s a comedy, really, of which *Anziehung*, “attraction”, is the underlying theme (the drama to come will unfold in the altogether darker key of *con-traction, Einziehung*). From out of compulsion, in the unbinding of desire from necessity, emerges a new systemic regime—*Love*—under which the relationships between the potencies can proliferate exponentially. Love shows itself here both in each potency’s desire to attract its immediate superior, and in the “unfolding” or awakening of the expansive, expressive principle within the system as a whole. (This is, of course, not coincidental; love alone breaches and complicates being’s self-absorption.)

The awakening of this expressive principle (here called the “soul”) within the lowest potency marks the emergence of an unprecedented “artistic” tendency; or—in a certain

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108 “So now the cision is based on what is higher being elevated over what is lower than it and the lower, related to the higher, subsiding” (Schelling, *Ages of the World*, p.55/275).
109 Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *The Abyss of Freedom*, p.49, for an interesting discussion of Schelling’s use of these verbs in their multiple senses.
111 “The only difference between nature and the artist is that with nature the material is not outside the artist but
respect—a genuine individuation. What happens? The contracting and expansive principles discover their mutual compossibility through an exchange of information: a series of “images” [Bilder] transmitted along the system’s vertical axis, like wordless love letters, in which each potency intimates to its immediate superior: *I see into your dreams, I offer myself as flesh for their incarnation…*.\(^{112}\) This emanation and reception of images *is itself* an individuation, that is, a “new dimension” in which the potencies might find the solution to the problem that they are.

On the other hand, “*all these forms and formations have no actuality by themselves*”,\(^ {113}\) Schelling compares them, instead, to “a mere sport,” to “dreams or visions”.\(^ {114}\) We could say that they have a *virtual* existence—or, rather, that this playful and spontaneously generative nature itself inheres virtually in what will unfold as historical actuality.

There are, I believe, good reasons for invoking the concept of virtuality at this juncture. In our earlier discussion of difference, this concept emerged as a way to understand the capacity for becoming without recourse to resemblance, and hence to some pre-existing identity. For this very reason, it is an invaluable tool for analyzing processes of individuation. And thus it’s not really surprising that Schelling’s account of divine individuation would at some point generate something that functions, within the framework of his ontology, very much in the way that the concept of the virtual functions for Deleuze.

A closer look at the text seems to confirm this functional isomorphism. Although Schelling uses the language of the form, the image, and the archetype, these products of nature

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\(^{112}\) “The more the soul arises [within A1], the more lucidly it sees into that which is above it…and knows all of the possibilities contained within it, possibilities that the soul…seeks to express immediately and to incarnate” (Schelling, *Ages of the World*, p.59/279).


unexpectedly elude relations of resemblance, verging instead upon a purely problematic existence:

…while these [archetypes] are certainly not to be thought of as physical substances or as empty genera, nonetheless neither are they to be thought of as finished and available forms, existing without movement and, so to speak, static. For they are precisely ideas in that they are something eternally becoming and in incessant movement and generation.\textsuperscript{115}

In other words, these are not models hovering aloofly above their mortal copies. Self-identity? They have none; they persist as perpetually becoming. Nor can they be distinguished from the system’s individuation, for they are acts of expression in which each of the potencies simultaneously discovers and communicates itself.\textsuperscript{116}

The eternal coming-to-being of God therefore includes, along with the opening of space and time, the emergence of a virtual modality of being. Like the opening of space-time itself, the virtual is not so much a moment of historical time, as an aspect of the eternal present that inheres in each passing moment as its boundary or threshold (and hence the imagistic messages populating the virtual “neither pass away…nor do they abide. Rather, it is the moment that abides eternally.”)\textsuperscript{117}

Finally, a word on the position of this moment in the larger narrative. In the textual divisions provided by Schelling’s son (which seem to follow quite faithfully the articulations inherent in the text itself), the description of eternal nature and of the Godhead \textit{qua} “independent” entities comprises the first (and largest) part of the book, while the historical

\textsuperscript{115} Schelling, \textit{Ages of the World}, pp.66-67/290.
\textsuperscript{116} “So eternal nature showed [God] the way in which he could lead her…out of darkness and back into the light.” And, a few sentences later: “The word ‘idea’…actually denotes, in accordance with its original meaning, nothing other than our German word ‘Gesicht’ and, indeed, in both senses that the word designates: the glimpse and what passes by in the glimpse” (Schelling, \textit{Ages of the World}, p.66/289).
\textsuperscript{117} Schelling, \textit{Ages of the World}, p.67/290.
actualization of the divine system is the subject of the third part. The entire second part elaborates what happens in the eternal present, “after” the alliance of the Godhead with nature, but “before” the beginning of history—in short, it describes that liminal moment of being we have just characterized as the virtual. This narrative positioning confirms the status of virtuality as a *sine qua non* of full individuation, such that there would be no actualization not proceeding from, bathed within, and haunted by a virtual milieu. Yet it also suggests that virtuality is itself the *product* of a more primitive individuation. Pure necessity lacks a virtual dimension; only in its opening onto freedom does the system of being discover its boundless creative capacities.

VI. Love

We opened this chapter with a question: can we speak intelligibly of an impersonal or preindividual love—a love that would be an ontological affect or event? Is there a sense in which being as such happens lovingly? We chose to pursue our inquiry along the lines of the divine genesis described in Schelling’s *Weltalter*—a choice which in turn has involved us in issues of being, freedom, and individuation, and thereby seemingly led us far afield of our original question.

It’s time now to reel in these various lines of inquiry, to see what conclusions (if any) they have managed to snare. We will begin by outlining the various phenomena that appear under the name of love over the course of Schelling’s text. This will then enable us to clarify the relationship between love and desire, and to draw some provisional conclusions regarding love’s affinity or alliance with the virtual, and its role in processes of individuation.

*The varieties of love*

An initial survey of the narrative reveals several modalities of love, enumerated here in
1. Love is, in a sense, the point of departure for Schelling’s argument: if God as we know Him “is” Love, this implies a primordial duplicity in God, since Love does not include its own ontological prerequisites—on the contrary, the self-seeking movement of being seems actively incompatible with the “infinite communicativity and emanation [unendliche Mittheilsamkeit und Ausfließlichkeit]” we call love. Since Schelling speaks of God in the present tense, we can assume that this Love is a fully developed and differentiated divine affect or aspect. Schelling himself, however, offers no further elaboration at this point: beyond the indication of its difference from being, Love remains largely undetermined.\(^{119}\)

2. As Schelling proceeds to show how this difference between love and being plays out in terms of God’s necessary nature, the tenor of the discussion immediately changes. We no longer speak of Love (and Being), but simply of A (and B), neutral currents within the system of nature. The smoothness of the transition from Love to “A” must not mislead us—there will be no direct continuity or line of development between this systemic principle and love as we know it. On the other hand, “A” marks a kind of critical threshold of love, a minimal energetic condition that prefigures and prepares for it, like the first significant agitations in the protobiotic (proto-erotic?) soup. (The same holds true, \textit{mutatis mutandis}, for the second potency, in which A has preeminence.)

3. Once we enter the realm of nature’s virtual productions, everything changes. In their


\(^{119}\) We shouldn’t expect more specificity from Schelling, not this early in the game: without knowledge of the trials and tribulations of God’s eternal and historical pasts, we could not hope to understand fully the meaning of divine love. Schelling’s concluding “General Discussion” of pantheism reveals his impatience with those “who eternally reiterate the assurance of the harmony and wonderfully blessed unity of the cosmos” without recognizing that “the true prime matter of all life and existence is precisely what is horrifying” (Schelling, \textit{Ages of the World}, p.104/339).
contact with freedom, the potencies rapidly individuate away from their original status as pure
tendencies or energetic differentials—and it’s here that love appears once again. Here it names
the experience of productive communication developing within and amongst the individuating
potencies. Contrary to what we might expect, however, love is not a direct descendent of
principle A, but rather an effect or product of the coupling of necessity and freedom. Love is that
which “comes to be out of compulsion [Zwang],” but which is identical neither with freedom nor
with compulsion. Love would seem to be related, in its genesis and ongoing action, to the
behavior of the system as a whole, in its freedom. Note, above all, that the emergence of love
coincides with the emergence of the virtual (we will have more to say of this later).

4. We would expect to be able to conclude this enumeration with a description of fully
evolved divine Love, and hence a clarification of our point of departure—but this is not the case.
Schelling’s account of divine actualization breaks off with God and Nature still in a state of
contraction, colored predominantly by pain, wrath, and violent struggle. God’s actualization as a
loving, rather than an exclusively wrathful, being, the emergence and development of human
beings and human love—these were to have been topics for the second and third parts of the
Weltalter project. But these latter writings never appeared (we shall have more to say about this,
as well).

In sum: Schelling has not given love a starring role in this narrative. The account of the
divine prehistory concerns not love, but (at best) the energetic or dynamic prerequisites for the
emergence of love; the concluding description of God’s historical actualization only gets as far as
the wrathful “contractive” phase, falling silent before the point of love’s ascendancy. Only in the

120 Schelling, *Ages of the World*, p.55/275. Compare this description to that of love *qua* principle of nature, which
seems to fall wholly on the side of necessity.
central portion of the narrative is love at all prominent, suggesting a strong complicity between love and the virtual. It’s as though love flourished first and most of all in the boundless creative freedom of virtual nature in which each potency offers to the others the potential lines of development for their respective singularities.

We still need, however, to determine what this virtual love is. What does it mean, for example, to say that love comes to be from out of compulsion? For the key to this problem, we must explore the relationship between love and desire.

Desiring Nature

Desire last appeared in the context of the movement from necessity to freedom. More precisely, we saw that the reorientation of the system toward freedom occurs in and through the differentiation of desire from necessity. Undifferentiated from necessity, desire knots itself obsessively around the highest degree of being; liberated, it flows freely across the spectrum of ontological intensities. We noted above the way in which Schelling indicates this change through the terminological shift from obsession [Sucht] to yearning [Sehnsucht]. With regard to the latter term, Wirth offers an enlightening footnote, defining it as “non-object oriented desire, desire that moves beyond itself, but not because it is oriented toward any object in particular. It is an obsession [Sucht] with the movement of Sehnen (longing or pining) itself.”121 Thus, to a certain extent, desire’s liberation from the compulsion to claim being takes the form of a positive enjoyment in its own movement upon the threshold of pure freedom.

Now, love is not a species of desire, although desire’s liberation is a precondition for the emergence of love. Love itself is not this intensive flow traversing the potencies. Instead, we

121 Schelling, Ages of the World, p.146, fn.94.
might say that love is the solution to the problem posed by desiring nature and freedom. It is not in itself a thing, but an inherent potentiality of the divine system, a possible mode of integration of nature and freedom. Schelling alludes to the Platonic myth of Poros and Penia.\(^\text{122}\) the catch is that Penia’s—that is, necessary nature’s—productive potential, its wealth of individuating capacity, remains hidden until its “wedding” with Poros, freedom; a coupling of which Love itself is born. Love thus has the status of an emergent property that subsequently affects the system in which it emerges. In this way, love would seem to possess simultaneously more and less being than desire. Wherever there is nature (that is, intensive difference), there desire flows;\(^\text{123}\) love is of a different order of complexity altogether, and hence far more fragile and uncommon. Under love, such capacities emerge as to transform the entire system in kind—even if love itself must vanish in the transformation.\(^\text{124}\)

\textit{Actualization}\(^\text{125}\)

Let us say that love is an event of passage. (With this claim, we simply follow the claim of Diotima in Plato’s \textit{Symposium}: Love is the daimon who sleeps upon the threshold, love moves across difference without thereby negating it.) What kind of passage, we ask? Perhaps many different sorts of passage could mark a love-event; but here, in Schelling’s text, the type of passage in question is one between modalities or degrees of being. Within the virtual, love

\(^{122}\) Schelling, \textit{Ages of the World}, p.31/244.

\(^{123}\) This emerges nowhere more clearly than in the account of divine actualization in the modality of wrath. Schelling’s description of the relationship between the principles in terms of “turgor” and, even more tellingly, the “orgasm of forces” [\textit{der Orgasmus der Kräfte}] suggests that the enjoyment of a sadomasochistic regime of desire precedes any actualization of God’s more loving (or lovable) aspects. Cf. \textit{Ages of the World}, pp. 93-95/324-328.

\(^{124}\) As we see in the third part of Schelling’s text, in which the virtual regime of love passes over into an actualization initially governed by wrath.

\(^{125}\) Throughout this section, I am indebted to Michel Serres’s discussion of love, Plato’s \textit{Symposium}, and the concept of the \textit{tessera}, in \textit{The Parasite}, translated by Lawrence R. Schehr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. 233-251. Although my conclusions differ from those of Serres, his text acted as both a catalyzing reminder and a clarification of the potential relevance of these concepts for my argument.
assures the flux of ideas and their proto-actualizations between the potencies; but love also marks the passage or channel between virtuality and actuality as such, as well as that between freedom and being. (Freedom’s name, “Poros”, also names passage.) Love would thus be the passage of the passage, its manifestation or inscription within the field of being as it resolves the latter’s *aporia*.) This perhaps becomes clearer when we examine what happens in the first stages of divine actualization.

The virtual inheres within its passage into actuality, just as the eternal present occurs as the eternal passage into linear time. We’ve seen already that the name of the game, for virtuality, is a kind of theurgic desire: nature *wants* to draw down the Godhead, to be the latter’s incarnation. The Godhead, in turn, is perpetually entering into Being; it is both the absolute Outside to the system of nature—the point at which every individuation or determination dissolves into molten indeterminacy—and the affirmation through which the system passes over into actual existence in space and time. It is this multivalent character of the Godhead, already reflected in the difference between the potencies, which determines how historical actualization unfolds.

The potencies, as we have seen, coexist in virtual simultaneity, but their actualization in time must be successive rather than simultaneous. This means that linear time will unfold in three successive “aeons”, the succession of which will follow the virtual hierarchy. God’s first actualization is under the sign of the contractive, rather than the expansive or unifying, potency; actualization is initially “might” [*die Stärke*] and “wrath” [*der Zorn*], a fierce darkness and

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127 “For insofar as the Godhead in itself neither has being nor does not have being, the Godhead negates all external Being through the Godhead’s essence and nature” (Schelling, *Ages of the World*, p.73/298).
128 “Whoever has followed the preceding attentively must have perceived by themselves how, in the Highest’s assumption of Being or life, the same succession, in turn, took place that had taken place between the principles of eternal nature” (Schelling, *Ages of the World*, p.81/308-309).
closure, wrathful precisely in its refusal or denial\textsuperscript{129} of the virtual it envelops. Of course, actualization always is and must be a limitation upon and concealing of the virtual, though the latter remains immanent to it as its most intimate \textit{me on}. Here, however, that limitation is taken to the extreme: the loving, free relationship between the virtual potencies is “inverted”, for what now passes into actuality is the “negating force” or contractive aspect of each of the principles.\textsuperscript{130} (Note that this constriction and occlusion of the virtual also dooms the first actualization to a certain degree of unconsciousness: it does not know itself as (only) a beginning of a succession virtually implicated within it, for such knowledge would already be its transformation into something other than pure wrath and contraction.) In short, where love affirms and embraces the plurality of divergent virtuals—as though the passage between virtual and actual were stretched wide enough to permit a thousand worlds into existence—the regime of wrath narrows the aperture, forcing that which passes through into uncomfortable unity.

On the other hand, however, Schelling describes the \textit{fact} of this passage (i.e., God’s decision in favor of revelation) as “a work of the highest Love.”\textsuperscript{131} Freedom passes into Being: this is the mystery of the gratuitous, of donation, \textit{agape}. Or perhaps it is not so much of a mystery, since it is within this \textit{agape} that the problematic disparity within the divine field finds its ongoing solution. The passage is itself an act of love, regardless of what specifically passes into actuality—or perhaps because what passes is always in some sense freedom.

\textsuperscript{129} In his description of divine actualization, Schelling often speaks in terms of the “eternal No” [\textit{das ewige Nein}]; cf. \textit{Ages of the World}, pp.73-78/299-305. As with the terminology of “will”, this language tends to prefigure the emergence of a divine subject or person; on the other hand, however, it can be taken equally to suggest that affirmation and negation occur first as neutral, asubjective ontological events. Here, after all, God does not say “Yes” or “No”, but rather is the “Yes” and the “No”.

\textsuperscript{130} “…when Stringency is the governing principle, the negating force also stressed itself in the mildly discharging principle (A\textsuperscript{2}). And in the originary self-enclosing principle…the negating force elevated itself out of its depths and concealment so that consequently only hostile forces encounter each other in both” (Schelling, \textit{Ages of the World}, p.89/319).

\textsuperscript{131} Schelling, \textit{Ages of the World}, p.83.
What is distinctive about the first actualization, therefore, is not the event of passage itself, but rather in the way this event occurs. Specifically, how do those joined in or co-constituted by the passage—and in this case, it’s always the individual and the individuating system that are so joined—relate to each other? In this context of relation, love appears less as agape than as a sort of philia. Does the individual remain “friends” with the system to which it owes its genesis, or does it attempt repudiation? Does it affirm or deny the virtual excess it carries with it? Simondon\textsuperscript{132} invokes the ancient practice whereby a host and his guest would break in half a piece of pottery, each keeping his half as a symbol (symbolon) of past and future hospitalities; similarly, says Simondon, the individual is always itself a “symbol” of genesis, co-existing alongside the individuating system that is its complementary but unequal half.\textsuperscript{133} Granted the agapic fact of this complementarity, ontological philia would then be the regime of continued hospitality and friendliness towards the foreign, the openness of the individual to subsequent individuations, and of the actual to the virtual it envelops.

*Ontological love: A strategic perspective*

I believe I have adequately shown that love’s emergence within an individuating system occurs (or can occur) prior to that system’s production of either subjectivity or personhood; in fact, both the “agapic” and “philieac” modes of ontological love would seem to be prerequisites to such production. In response to the question with which we opened this chapter, viz., whether and in what sense we can speak of love as an impersonal ontological event, we therefore appear to have an answer: Yes.

We need to ask another question, however: What are the consequences of speaking in this

\textsuperscript{132} See also Serres’ discussion of the tessera in *Parasite*, p.233, 248-249.
\textsuperscript{133} Simondon, *Individuation*, pp.63-65.
way—for our understanding of Schelling, for our ontology, and for our concept(s) of love in general?

Schelling’s text occupies a sort of onto-theological no-man’s-land. On the one hand, he writes within the tradition of Christian onto-theology, a tradition in which “[no] God satisfies reason and feeling that is a pure It. They demand a God that is a He,”¹³⁴ that is, a subject or person. In its proposed three parts, the Weltalter project was to have traced the ontogenesis of both the world and the divine Person. We have already noted, on the other hand, that Schelling never completed this project; what exists of it breaks off prior both to the emergence of human or divine subjectivity, and to the actualization of love. Thus the text simultaneously anticipates these developments, and suggests—by the fact that they never took place—their impossibility, at least within the system described by the text.

In my reading, I have tried to show that the metastable, intensively differentiated system described by Schelling suffices in itself—according to the criteria set down by Simondon—for the production of individuals. In other words, it seems that the problem posed by the intersection of being and freedom finds its ongoing solution in the progressive individuation of a world or universe, without the need for “top down” intervention by subjective agency. Indeed, on Schelling’s own terms, if and when such agency were to arise in the form of a divine Person, it would only be as a product, rather than an author or precondition, of this individuating system. Therefore—from a certain perspective—the projected emergence of such divine subjectivity or personhood would appear to be superfluous to the productive functioning of the system. Yet superfluous does not mean insignificant: the decision to read the Weltalter as oriented primarily toward the emergence of “a God that is a He” cannot but reflect back upon the system as a

whole, especially in our understanding of such phenomena as will, desire, freedom—and love.

And, to the extent that fidelity to Schelling’s text does seem to require such an orientation (that is, to the extent to which this reader’s own ambivalence toward any theism comprises a tacit betrayal of Schelling), these phenomena will always tend to lose the strictly impersonal character we have attempted to ascribe to them, irresistibly drawn toward the personality and subjectivity whose emergence they were invoked to explain.

In short: although we can speak of impersonal ontological love, ought we to do so? Such a discourse will be fraught with dangers. Perhaps the worse of these is one both Schelling and Hegel knew well: the danger of sugarcoating the genuinely traumatic aspects of reality with “edifying,” even “insipid”\textsuperscript{135} lullabies about infinite Love. We should probably also mistrust, on general grounds, the desire to find mirrored and affirmed everywhere—even in the structures of being qua being!—what might, after all, be an experience unique to human (or at any rate finite) individuals. In short, to conceive of love as an ontological event is to generate a concept highly prone to misconception. Finally, I have suggested that to push our understanding of love too far in the direction of impersonality may be to risk—for better or worse—a betrayal of Schelling’s text. All of this would suggest that, if we wish to steer clear of imputing some sort of subjectivity, agency, or personhood to being \textit{qua} being, we should probably find some other language with which to characterize the event of passage we have named “ontological love”.

There is, however, an additional consideration. We have asked after the relation between ontological and interpersonal love. The difficulties mentioned above arise from the tendency to import our commonplaces about human experience into phenomena that exceed or simply differ

\textsuperscript{135} Hegel, \textit{The Phenomenology of Spirit}, translated by A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1977), p.10. For Schelling’s expression of a similar qualm, see above, fn. 119; and consider, of course, the relatively limited role given to love in the \textit{Ages of the World}. 
from the human. However (and as befits the status of love as a *passage*) this relationship or attraction goes both ways; instead of always and only making ontological love all too personal, we could explore the sometimes disquieting extent to which human love experiences partake of the *impersonal*. Put slightly differently, if ontological and human love turn out not to be so incommensurable after all, it may be precisely because of the latter’s *impersonality*—even its *inhumanity*. Human love, too, is a product of individuation that in turn affects the individuating system(s), sometimes to the extent that we can no longer say for certain who or what is individuated, who is loved, whether love is still or has ever “been there” at all; human love, too, involves an alliance with and affirmation of the excess of virtual to actual, as well as provoking a certain regime (or range of regimes) of desire.\(^{136}\) Moreover, human love retains the elusive character of an emergent event: it arises and vanishes unpredictably, sometimes in the actualization of the very possibilities to which it has granted loving passage. The very fact that we can choose, or not, to name a given ontological structure “love,” manifests an undecidability or imperceptibility intrinsic to love itself—for as Schelling has already shown us, love has no being of its own. As event, it inheres in the fragility of metastable systems, always prone to misrecognition, or to transformation—in the moment of the passage it is—into something other than itself. If the concept of ontological love has any value, it may be simply to remind us of the evanescence and fragility of the event of love as such, whatever form it may take.

\(^{136}\) The following chapters will take up these questions in greater detail.
CHAPTER TWO: EROS AND ASSEMBLAGE

I. Transition

We looked for love in a divine ontogenesis, hoping to find it inscribed within the beating heart of being \textit{qua} being. And we found love, or at any rate something bearing its name: an event of passage in which the intensive and problematic difference between freedom and necessary nature finds its solution in the production of individuals. Before (though perhaps not \textit{that} much before) the emergence of anything like an individual, a person, or a subject, love emerged within the divine system, appearing always at systemic thresholds: love named events of passage between necessity and freedom, between actual and virtual, even between the individual and the individuating milieu. In the end, however, it also formed a threshold between two very different types of discourse, and we hesitated there, torn between Schelling’s onto-theology and the materialist ontology with which we would betray it—and wary that whatever concept of love we stole from Schelling’s text would betray us in turn.

Were we looking for love in all the wrong places?

Begin again, this time upon more familiar terrain. Whatever erotic regimes may determine the life of being \textit{qua} being, if we can know them—if they even exist at all—it is only concretely, in, through, across the field of finite beings. If ontological love is not equivocally so named, it needs to prove itself in the loves we know.

The heart of the remainder of our investigation lies in two documents expressive of one very distinctive erotic regime: the so-called “pedagogical pederasty” of ancient Athens, as it is taken up and transformed by Plato in the \textit{Phaedrus} and the \textit{Symposium}. Our reading aims to extract from these dialogues the singular traits of a particular erotic system (namely, the “pedagogical pederasty” of ancient Athens) and the ways in which it is taken up and transformed
by Plato. We have selected this type of system for many reasons, and not least because it explicitly posits and thematizes a link between eros and individuation. In keeping with our procedure thus far, we'll read the dialogues through the lens of the ontology (or ontologies) of Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari. This, however, will take some time (two chapters' worth) and multiple steps to achieve, and a sketch of our plan of attack might be helpful at this point.

We'll start with a discussion of desire, followed by the introduction of a set of concepts—including but not limited to those of deterritorialization and decoding—developed by Deleuze and Guattari in A Thousand Plateaus. Next we will attempt to describe the system of conventional pederasty as it seems to have operated around the time of Socrates and Plato; since this is the system with which the Socrates of the Symposium and the Phaedrus is in dialogue, understanding it will greatly assist in our effort to determine just what Socrates (and/or Plato) is up to. Having done that, we'll then investigate the ways in which the dialogues transform (or “deterritorialize”) the concepts and practices of conventional pederasty. Throughout, we will pay attention to the relationship between eros and both poetic and philosophical logos. This discussion will bring us to the end of the chapter.

In the third and final chapter, we will return to the theme of individuation, analyzing as individuating systems the erotic regimes proposed by Socrates. This discussion will include an analysis of the changing roles of lover and beloved, as well as a continuing emphasis upon the linguistic and semiotic dimensions of the relationship. Once we have determined the various mechanisms, modes and products of individuation at work in these systems (a task which will include testing our theoretical framework against a concrete example of such individuation), we can then compare them to the onto-erotic system described in the first chapter and attempt to discern any isomorphism(s) (or lack thereof) between the two. We'll conclude with a few

1 See the Introduction for a discussion of these reasons.
reflections upon the dangers and benefits of this theory and practice of *eros*, and some
tindications in the direction of friendship (*philia*) as an alternative and complementary type of
individuating system.

**II. Some Preliminary Remarks on the Ontology of Deleuze-Guattari**

*Defining desire*

Let’s assume that Schelling is right: love is not a primitive component of the universe. It
does not subsist eternally, but emerges from and inheres within various systemic phenomena.
And there seems *a priori* to be no reason to suppose that human love differs from its ontological
counterpart, at least in this regard. But desire? Desire is another story altogether. As we saw, the
circulation of the potencies runs on desire, a desire that initially appears under the sign of
necessity, indistinguishable from the imperative *to be*. And yet, from another perspective, desire
is always-already twisting free of necessity, flowing across the gap between nature and freedom.
Love arises and departs within this system, but the circulation of desire never ceases.

Desire *must* precede the formation of any person or thing, for it is itself the movement or
process responsible for the production of persons and things; it is being in its productive mode.
In other words, it’s not that being *qua* being is always-already personal, but rather that desire
itself—even human desire—is fundamentally inhuman, impersonal, and asubjective.

After all, why else would we need the practices and institutions of society, if not as a
means of humanizing or domesticating this flow of desiring nature within us? Deleuze and
Guattari have written a great deal concerning the various transformations, channelings or
harnessings, di- and per-versions to which we human beings and our social institutions have
subjected the flows of desire. The cumulative effect of these operations has been to produce a
misrecognition of the very nature\textsuperscript{2} of desire, culminating in the “triple curse” cast upon it by psychoanalytic discourse, first when it diagnoses desire as a kind of lack (since it must lack what it desires); then when it prescribes pleasure as the telos and point of discharge for desire; and finally when it warns us that the full satisfaction of desire is intrinsically impossible.\textsuperscript{3} Against this definition, Deleuze and Guattari propose an understanding of desire as a process or event producing “singular states of intensity”\textsuperscript{4} and possessed of its own particular joy. Although various regimes of desire can and do teach us to experience our desire always as a desire-for (a lacking object), desire in itself entails no necessary relationship to any object at all. Nor is it intrinsically sexual; rather, sexuality is just one flow or line of desire among others.\textsuperscript{5}

If desire is a process, what form does this process take? The process of desire is the formation of “assemblages” (\textit{agencements}): “there is no desire but assembling, assembled, desire.”\textsuperscript{6} But in order to understand what an assemblage is and what it does, we’ll need first to discuss two other concepts from which it is inseparable: the \textit{strata} and the \textit{territory}.

\textit{Strata and assemblage}

We must begin at the geological level, with the Earth itself, described as a “body without organs…permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free intensities...
or nomadic singularities, by mad or transitory particles.” This is *natura naturans*, or Schelling’s divine nature defined as the incessant production of space, time, and matter; it is the moment of intensive differences, prior to their actualization in extensity. Look again, however, and we see another side to the Earth’s activity: *stratification*, or “phenomena of thickening on the Body of the earth,” comprising “accumulations, coagulations, sedimentations, foldings” of these unstable material-energetic flows into more-or-less stable configurations. In other words, strata are operations of individuation, produced by the very intensive differences and singularities that they then proceed to cancel out or imprison in extensity. (We glimpsed, perhaps, the beginnings of this in Schelling, when the divine nature’s first passage into actuality occurred as a contraction or repression of nature’s intensive multiplicity.)

Another useful word for stratification is *articulation*. The Earth undergoes and enacts a continual process of self-articulation whereby the unformed, unstable, Heraclitean flux subsides or rigidifies into formed matters (“content”) and functional structures (“expression”). Yet the distinction between these two products of articulation, content and expression, is never absolute, for it refers not to an essential difference, but rather to the way in which the two relate to each other: content is always content of expression, expression is always expression of content, and neither of these terms pre-exists the process of articulation that simultaneously distinguishes them and places them into relation. Massumi describes this relationship as an encounter between two “substance-form complexes” in which “the forces of one are captured by the forces of the other and are subsumed by them, contained by them.” This suggests that, depending upon the tangle of forces operative in a given context, an element can play either role: for instance, the same basic atomic components within an organism appear both as part of the genetic code

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responsible for processes of organic structuration, and as the content undergoing these processes.

Although the boundary between one stratum and another is always somewhat porous and indistinct, Deleuze and Guattari draw a rough distinction between three major strata: the physicochemical, the organic, and the anthropomorphic or “alloplastic”, each of which subsists only in a state of perpetual fraying or splintering into subsidiary para- or epistrata. Each stratum derives its distinctive character or “unity of composition” from its constitutive materials and formal relations, and in particular from a distinctive relationship between content and expression. Compare, for instance, the physicochemical and organic strata: whereas the physicochemical stratum operates through the emergent ordering of molecular materials into molar structures (the latter constituting the expression of a molecular content), the expressive aspect of the organic stratum takes the form of a line of DNA, \textit{itself molecular}, which operates upon other molecules to produce the “molar” entity, the organism. Finally, upon the alloplastic strata we witness the emergence of a new form of expression, language, which relates to new contents in unprecedented ways.

We could also think of it as a question of what type(s) of production or mode(s) of individualisation predominates in a given situation, or from a given perspective. As we saw in our discussion of Simondon last chapter, there are specific mechanisms and material components involved in the production of a salt crystal within the physicochemical stratum, and these mechanisms and components differ from those responsible for the formation and perpetuation of a single-celled organism within the organic stratum; and both of these differ in turn from the

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\(^{10}\) Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, p.502/607. When referring to the alloplastic stratum, we typically have in mind distinctively human and social phenomena (although theoretically the stratum has plenty of room for non-human groups).

\(^{11}\) Compare this with Deleuze’s description of the system of intensive coupled differences, in which each is already itself composed of a similar coupled difference.

elements involved in the production of a language, tool, or social institution upon the alloplastic stratum. Conversely, elements and types of relation are continually leaking or escaping from one stratum to another, entering into new contexts in which they play new and different roles. A material element such as salt will function very differently in geological formations, cellular processes, and social productions (such as the Salt March of 1934, Gandhi’s nonviolent protest against the British monopoly on salt-harvesting in India).

It’s time now to determine the nature and role of the assemblage in this system. Deleuze himself defines an assemblage as “a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them,” the only unity of which “is that of co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a ‘sympathy’.” Assemblages typically involve both “states of things” (bodies) and “utterances” (organizations of signs), each of these types of component ultimately expressing an event wherein lies the sole form of unity attributable to the assemblage as a whole.

As Manuel DeLanda notes, the concept of assemblage functions for Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari as an alternative to the traditional concept of “organic totalities”. Unlike traditional descriptions of large-scale organizations as a massive Animal or Human Being—with all of the emphasis upon integration, harmony, interiority and internalization that this view has historically implied—an assemblage features relations of exteriority between its parts, such that “a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different.” So, in his discussion of the European

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14 Deleuze and Parnet, Dialogues, pp.70-71.
16 DeLanda, A New Philosophy of Society, p.10.
medieval feudal assemblage, Deleuze notes that the invention of the stirrup (which “made possible a new military unity in giving the knight lateral stability”\textsuperscript{17}) owed the extent and character of its impact to its relation to other aspects of the assemblage (specifically, the grant of land to knights);\textsuperscript{18} in other assemblages, the same technology could and did play significantly different roles. As this example shows, the exteriority of relations between the components of an assemblage also entails both their contingency and historicity.

In relation to the strata, an assemblage forms what Deleuze-Guattari name a “surface of stratification”. This surface has a dual relationship to the strata. On the one hand, it lies between any two given strata, effectuating the relationship and passage of various kinds of flows between them (for example, the aforementioned feudal assemblage operates between the organic and alloplastic strata, bringing human social institutions and practices into new relationships with organic structures—that of the horse, naturally, but also that of the human being, whose physical forces are conjugated with those of the horse via the stirrup). If the earlier discussion of stratification left us wondering how exactly such processes come to pass, we now have our answer: in each case, stratification is effectuated by an assemblage. On the other hand, the assemblage has one face turned away from the strata, toward the Body without Organs (BwO), that site of preindividual singularities and untamed material flows. This duplicity of the assemblage amounts to a second mode of operation: it stratifies, imposing articulations upon the BwO, but it also \textit{destratifies}, liberating diverse components from their stratified situation (again, the feudal assemblage: through its relationship to its human rider, the horse takes up a new position upon the alloplastic stratum).

\textsuperscript{17} Deleuze and Parnet, \textit{Dialogues}, p.69.
\textsuperscript{18} “In the case of the stirrup, it was the grant of land, linked to the beneficiary’s obligation to serve on horseback, which was to impose the new cavalry and harness the [stirrup] in the complex assemblage of feudalism” (Deleuze and Parnet, \textit{Dialogues}, p.70).
Deleuze-Guattari draw a further distinction within these two modalities or tendencies of the assemblage. First, there is a set of processes of coding. We may define a code as “a pattern of repeated acts”\textsuperscript{19} effectuated within an assemblage and performed upon a given population. Coding imposes a certain structure or function upon the members of the population; it thus takes place at the “molecular” level, but its effects appear statistically in the molar entity made up of such a population. To use an example from Deleuze-Guattari, we can account for the primacy of the face in certain social assemblages—the fact that the face has a different social “value” or “meaning” than the rest of the body, and is typically treated as representative or expressive of the individual’s selfhood in a way that the rest of the body is not—through a two-step process in which the human head is first decoded (such that the coding of the body no longer applies),\textsuperscript{20} then overcoded by “the Face”.\textsuperscript{21} Through a wide variety of actions, mechanisms and institutions, Western society facializes its individual members.\textsuperscript{22} As this example suggests, however, nothing is ever simply coded once and for all; rather, every code brings with it an inherent “margin of decoding,” that is, fluctuations or mutations upon the molecular level that may give rise to a general molar “drift” away from the original code.\textsuperscript{23} In other words, although coding in general seems to pertain primarily to the stratifying operations of an assemblage, the effect of any given coding operation might tend rather in the direction of destratification.


\textsuperscript{20} We see the effects of such decoding in mainstream Western society’s insistence that (for example) the public display of one’s naked body (outside a handful of special contexts) is deemed “inappropriate” or even obscene, whereas the display of one’s naked face is not only acceptable, but practically an inviolable right, or even an obligation of the individual.

\textsuperscript{21} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, p.170/208.

\textsuperscript{22} This is but one example; needless to say, processes of coding do not belong exclusively to the alloplastic stratum. On the organic stratum, the genetic code functions through a similar pattern of repeated acts (in this case, the cellular synthesis of particular proteins) in such a way as to produce certain effects on the “molar” level (the individual organism as an aggregate of cells, but also the population of similarly-coded organisms). Even on the physicochemical stratum, repeated acts of erosion may operate upon molecular units (say, particles of muck) to produce distinctively structured molar individuals (rock formations), as Massumi explains (\textit{User’s Guide}, p.51).

\textsuperscript{23} Deleuze-Guattari here invoke the example of genetic drift: not only does the genetic code vary within a given population, but code-fragments can pass between species (\textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, p.53/69-70).
The second set of processes by which the assemblage operates concern territory. Every assemblage “stakes out a territory” upon the skin of the earth or the Body without Organs, and has its own distinctive relation(s) to and mode(s) of occupying this territory. This is most obviously the case for human social assemblages: recall again the importance, for the feudal assemblage, of the distribution of land based upon faithful service; or the profound shift that occurs whenever a population shifts from a nomadic to a sedentary mode of occupying its territory (or vice versa). We can broadly define a territory as the milieu furnishing the materials, forces, and sources to be “captured” or taken up by the assemblage.

Like coding, territory names not so much a spatial region as a set of possible movements, operations or relations to that region—the relationship of an assemblage to its territory or territories is never static. For one thing, various sorts of deterritorialization are continuously taking place: by choice, chance, or force a component of an assemblage (or the assemblage as a whole) loses or abandons its previous position within a territory and must then discover new territories to sustain it (reterritorialization). Sometimes these movements occur spatially (as in the migration of individuals or populations); sometimes they involve the development of different modes of access to energetic resources. Regardless of whether it is moving or standing still, the animal is deterritorialized in comparison to the salt crystal, since unlike the latter it carries with it many of its resources as an internal milieu—its cells have no need of continuous direct exposure to external sources of energy, for they have at their service the animal’s circulatory, respiratory, and digestive systems as a kind of portable energy source. The animal’s

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25 This is equally true of entities and assemblages characteristic of other strata. An animal also has its territory (its habitat or milieu), but so does a crystalline formation or a chemical reaction—since each depends for its existence upon the forces and matters furnished by a concrete milieu.
26 To put it in the language of the preceding chapter, the animal carries with it at least some of the intensive differences required for continued individuation.
deterritorialization therefore simultaneously entails a reterritorialization, this time upon the interior milieu.\textsuperscript{27} Finally, the movements of de- and reterritorialization inherent to the strata comprise \textit{lines of flight}: the line of flight that carries an animal population away from its habitual milieu, forcing it to develop new capacities and alliances with its new surroundings;\textsuperscript{28} but also, as we shall see, the wholly “stationary” line of flight experienced by the ancient Greek lover when he comes through love to discover new and different capacities within himself and his social milieu.

\textit{III. (Re)constructing Greek Eros}

\textit{The ancient Athenian erotic regime}\textsuperscript{29}

We can now return to our previous question: If desire is a process, what form does this process take? In the foregoing analysis of stratification, we’ve looked at reality from the point of view of the multiple material and energetic flows of which it is assembled; we’ve seen that these flows undergo various transformations, connections, sedimentations and liberations, generating and destroying orders of every scale and type. We’ve seen, moreover, that “desire” is just one name for such energetic flows, and that the processes experienced by each of us as psychic or emotional or sexual events are not different in kind from the adventures of other flows—magma, money, spices, information—across the earth. These flows meet, connect, interact, and react back upon themselves, and the loci of such transformative activity are \textit{assemblages}, contingent and

\textsuperscript{27} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, p.54/71.

\textsuperscript{28} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, p.55/72.

historically conditioned conjunctions of heterogeneous parts and forces. To inquire after a particular set of flows or transactions of desire requires, then, that we determine and describe the particular assemblage responsible.

This means that to understand both the conventional Athenian experience of *eros* in the fifth and fourth centuries *and* the nature of the Socratic-Platonic interventions within this experience, we’ll need to say a bit about the social assemblage in which this erotic regime was produced and held sway. In particular, we are concerned with the ways in which a particular form of *eros*—pedagogical pederasty—emerged and functioned within this society.

Why the focus on pederasty? Certainly it was neither the sole nor (arguably) even the most important form of sexual practice in ancient Greek society. Two factors grant it a privileged status for our purposes. First of all, the speakers in both the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* treat pederasty as the paradigmatic erotic relationship, and therefore as the point of departure for the erotic program(s) they propose; secondly (as I hope to show), the priority given to this type of relationship within the dialogues is neither simply an expression of the personal tastes of the speakers, nor merely the consequence of contemporary attitudes toward women. Something about the pederastic relationship and its role in the larger social structure rendered it an ideal candidate for certain transformations; our goal is to determine why this was the case, and what the nature of those transformations appears to have been.

Although many aspects of the pederastic relationship remain somewhat obscure, or at any rate contested, a few features emerge quite clearly from the available evidence. In the first

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30 The origins, extent, and purposes of ancient Greek pederasty remain a matter for debate. For example, scholars disagree as to whether same-sex relations in general (and pederasty in particular) were mostly restricted to the aristocracy and held in suspicion by the average majority, or whether these relations were both widespread and generally accepted (at least within certain limits). For a defense of the former view, cf. Thornton, *Eros*, p.196; for a defense of the latter position, cf. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp.90-91. In *Love among the Ruins: The Erotics of Democracy in Classical Athens* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002) Victoria Wohl argues persuasively that regardless of its actual extent in the general population, the pederastic
place, the nature of the participants: pederasty involved an adult male citizen and an adolescent male “who had not yet achieved his definitive status and who was in need of assistance, advice, and support.”

In the second place, the hierarchical structure of the relationship: this age difference between the participants ensured their social asymmetry, an asymmetry further enforced and intensified by the prescriptions and assumptions regarding the sexual practices of each party. Convention apportioned sexual desire, pleasure, and initiative exclusively to the older male, the lover, while insisting that the beloved’s ultimate surrender to his lover would be motivated, at best, by a genuine desire to please the one who had shown him so much kindness—and at worst by a mercenary attitude perilously close to that of a prostitute.

Finally, the conditions of social respectability: the asymmetrical nature of the pederastic relationship seems to have been a prerequisite for its acceptance within Athenian society. This isn’t surprising, given the prevailing tendency to view sexual activity in terms of “active” and “passive” roles, and to construe sexual passivity as a shameful violation of the male body (particularly the adult male citizen body). Given these premises, it followed that the only legitimate sexual activity for an adult male citizen would take an active, penetrative form, and that the only legitimate sexual

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31 Foucault, Uses of Pleasure, p.195. In his note to p.194, Foucault remarks that “the real age that is given for the partners tends to ‘float’” in the ancient texts. The concerns raised by Pausanias in the Symposium regarding the appropriate age for a beloved (“Actually, there should be a rule against loving young boys,” 181d-e), and the fact that Pausanias himself is depicted as the lover of Agathon (who was well past his adolescence at the time of the dialogue) also indicate that neither the lower nor the upper age limits for the beloved were written in stone.

32 For a discussion of the supposed sexual indifference of the beloved, cf. Calame, Poetics of Eros, pp.23-29, and Dover, Greek Homosexuality, pp.93-94; Dover notes that a beloved who takes pleasure in sexual relations with his lover “incurs disapproval as a pornos [prostitute] and as perverted.” Halperin reminds us, however, to remain sensitive to the difference between discourse and actual practice or lived experience: the texts that have come down to us indicate only “how sex is represented by those utterances and actions of free adult males that were intended to be overheard and witnessed by other free adult males” (One Hundred Years of Homosexuality, pp.29-30). Perhaps we can say only that the ancients had their reasons—compelling ones—to avoid attributing erotic desires and pleasures to the beloved, regardless of whether such desires and pleasures in fact played a role in the latter’s experience.
partner would be a social inferior.\textsuperscript{33} Hence the worry about overaged beloveds; hence, also, the conventional attempt to limit consummation to intercrural sex, and the unwillingness to attribute any enjoyment of this act to its passive recipient (whose future as an adult and full citizen already prohibited anything more than grudging acceptance of the passive role). The posture of lovers on Greek vases depicts this delicate erotic dynamic: while the lover gets down to business, the beloved gazes ahead stoically, compensating with his studied indifference for the passivity of his assigned role.\textsuperscript{34}

Such was the classical Athenian view of the pederastic couple—at least conventionally, and with respect to its most prominent characteristics. Neither the nature of the bond itself, however, nor the elaborate stylization it entailed is self-explanatory. The coexistence of pederastic relationships alongside heterosexual conjugality—typically within the life of a single individual—suggests that this isn’t a case of some original or natural pederastic proclivity that would subsequently have been forced into socially acceptable and productive channels.\textsuperscript{35} If Deleuze-Guattari are right to insist that desire is always “assembling” or “assembled,” it makes more sense to conceive pederastic \textit{eros} as a production of the social machine,\textsuperscript{36} and to investigate

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  \item As Halperin puts it, “‘Active’ and ‘passive’ sexual roles are…necessarily isomorphic with superordinate and subordinate social status: hence, an adult, male citizen of Athens can have legitimate sexual relations only with statutory minors (his inferiors not in age but in social and political status): the proper targets of his sexual desire include, specifically, women, boys, foreigners, and slaves” (\textit{One Hundred Years of Homosexuality}, p.30).
  \item Dover, \textit{Greek Homosexuality}, p.106.
  \item Although he recognizes clearly the socially constructed nature of pederastic practices, Thornton seems to posit a pre-existing pederastic tendency when he describes these practices as striking “a delicate balance between acknowledging the power of homosexual eros without corrupting the boy who is its object” (\textit{Eros}, p.196); a statement, moreover, which he seems to contradict earlier within the same paragraph, when he maintains that Greek eros “is ‘polymorphously perverse,’ flowing out toward any object” (\textit{Eros}, p.195). Both of these claims seem unable to explain why it is, given the problematic status of one object of desire (the boy), that ancient efforts focused upon merely controlling the flow of desire towards this particular object, rather than attempting to divert it altogether towards more acceptable objects (women and prostitutes). In other words, Thornton’s position seems to miss the extent to which ritualized “boy-love” is not simply a solution to an already existing erotic problem—a means of minimizing the potential damage, as it were—but rather the creation or construction of a problem which, despite the risks it entails, is in itself eminently \textit{profitable or useful} to the assemblage within which it emerges.
  \item Which would not make it any less “natural”, since nature itself operates by way of assemblages.
\end{itemize}
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how this set of practices functioned within the ancient Athenian social assemblage as a whole. We can look at this question from two perspectives. First, what historical processes brought about the conjunction of precisely these elements (older male, adolescent, sexual and social practices and utterances) in precisely this way? And secondly, how did the elements and exchanges structured by pederasty connect to the larger social machine?

Our evidence regarding the origin of pederastic eros, though suggestive, does not permit any definitive conclusions. The prevailing hypothesis remains that pederasty originated with the Dorians (chiefly the Cretans and Spartans) and was subsequently transmitted to the rest of Greece. Proponents of this hypothesis propose that classical pederasty constitutes an evolution—or, better, a deterritorialization—of rituals of initiation, such that an originally “magical” content (transference of potency) was replaced by an “ethical” content (transference of virtue), while retaining the same form of expression (homosexual contact). Against this hypothesis, Halperin points out that classical pederasty made social rather than sexual contact the vector for transmission of virtue (which makes the continuing sexual element difficult to account for), and “operate[d] through elective affinities and pair-bonding rather than through rituals that involve[d] entire age-classes”; the initiation hypothesis also tends to downplay the role of genuine desire in favor of a “universal social obligation” that would somehow be “nonsexual” in

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37 Several pieces of evidence support this position, particularly 1) the absence of overt homosexuality in the works of Homer (composed in an Ionian dialect, and traditionally associated with the Ionian island of Chios); 2) the tendency in classical Athens to associate pederastic practices with the Spartans and the Cretans; and 3) descriptions of a tradition of ritualized homosexual rape in Crete, in which a youth was abducted by an older suitor and lived with him in seclusion for a couple of months. For a discussion and critical evaluation of these and other points, cf. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, pp.184-196.

38 Cf. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp.56-57 for a description of this hypothesis (which is not, however, Halperin’s own). We may also consider the passage of Plato’s *Symposium* in which Agathon expresses (even if only half-seriously) a belief or hope that some of Socrates’ wisdom or virtue might pass to him through physical contact; cf.175c-d (“Here, Socrates, lie down alongside me, so that by my touching you, I too may enjoy the piece of wisdom that just occurred to you while you were in the porch.”) This and all further references from this dialogue are from Plato, *Symposium*, translated by Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
In any event, attempts to trace the historical origins and development of classical pederasty ultimately run up against the very real limitations of the available evidence: the most we can say is that, regardless of precisely where and how institutionalized pederasty originated, it seems to have taken root throughout Greece (including Athens) by the end of the seventh century B.C.E.  

Concerning the function of pederasty within the classical Athenian assemblage we can say somewhat more, and here I would like to focus upon the ideas presented by Claude Calame. Calame makes a case for a modified version of the initiation theory that seems rather more defensible, insofar as it explains how the erotic element of the pederastic relationship played not simply a vestigial but a central role in what was essentially a process of “civic production”: the production of a well-integrated male citizen. As a component of the larger social assemblage, pederastic courtship fulfilled its function by establishing philotes –that is, a “relationship of mutual trust” (a term which appears both in pederastic and conjugal contexts, incidentally)— between lover and beloved. The pederastic relationship thereby prepared the adolescent for and initiated him into the bonds of philia upon which civic commitment, social integration, and even conjugal relationships ultimately depended. Through the construction of a singular type of erotic experience, the city-state assemblage produced both the discrete political entities called “citizens” and the complex body of practices, utterances, and obligations opening each citizen beyond himself toward all of the others.

The ancient Athenians themselves seem to have connected pederastic practice to political

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39 Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality, p.58.  
40 Dover, Greek Homosexuality, p.196.  
41 Calame, Poetics of Eros, p.29. Calame devotes a substantial portion of his book to the status and education of girls and women, arguing that eros—particularly in the context of same-sex or “homophile” relationships— seems to have played a similar role in the cultural education of young women as it did in that of the young men.  
42 Calame, Poetics of Eros, pp.94-96.
concerns in at least two ways. Certainly they recognized its relevance with respect to democracy: as the speech of Pausanias\textsuperscript{43} in the $Symposium$ reminds us, proponents of pederasty could always point to the case of Harmodius and Aristogeiton (who killed Hipparchus, the brother of the tyrant Hippias, when Hipparchus attempted to supplant Aristogeiton as the lover of Harmodius) as evidence for a natural antipathy between pederasty and tyranny.\textsuperscript{44} Pausanias attributes the anti-tyrannical efficacy of pederasty (and the corresponding unwillingness of barbarians to countenance this type of relationship) not simply to the “great and proud thoughts” associated with $eros$, but also to the “strong friendships [$philias$] and associations…[that] love especially tends to implant.”\textsuperscript{45}

Similarly, ancient proponents of pederasty recognized and celebrated the connections between the erotic and the military aspects of the Athenian assemblage. We have already seen a strong association—at least in the ancient Greek imagination—of the origins of pederasty with the notoriously warlike Dorians. Yet the connection between war and pederasty also possessed a practical component: since liability for military service could begin at the age of eighteen, it was quite possible for lover and beloved to serve within the same battle, each spurred to greater valor by the desire to excel in the other’s eyes. In the $Symposium$, Phaedrus declares that “if there were any possibility that a city or an army could be composed of lovers and beloveds, then there could be no better way for them to manage their own city,”\textsuperscript{46} an idea reflected in actual military practices in Elis and Boiotia—most famously the “Sacred Band” of Thebes, an elite corps

\textsuperscript{43} Within the $Symposium$ Pausanias acts primarily as a mouthpiece for conventional views of $eros$ and pederasty.

\textsuperscript{44} Plato, $Symposium$, 182c-d.

\textsuperscript{45} Plato, $Symposium$, 182c-d. Thornton notes that the Harmodius-Aristogeiton legend was a popular subject of drinking songs performed at $symposia$ ($Eros$, p.199); and the $symposium$ was itself, in turn, a privileged site for pederastic pursuits. Wohl argues for the political and erotic significance of this legend for the ancient Athenian imagination (cf. $Love among the Ruins$, pp.3-12; 152-158; and 266-269).

\textsuperscript{46} Plato, $Symposium$, 178e-179a.
formed entirely of pairs of lovers.47

We should emphasize, however, that the function played by pederastic eros in the larger political and military assemblage depended upon such eros remaining within prescribed boundaries. Both the young man who granted his favors too freely (or for the wrong reasons) and the adult male who willingly submitted to sexual penetration and passivity were politically suspicious figures, as the prosecution of Timarchus by Aeschines in 346/5 B.C.E. seems to show.48 Aeschines accused Timarchus of having prostituted himself in his youth. Since prostitution itself (at least, voluntary prostitution) was not illegal, why make such a fuss? The problem stemmed from a law forbidding any citizen who had prostituted himself (or been prostituted by another)49 to exercise many of the civic responsibilities and privileges of full citizen. The prohibited activities included addressing the assembly and holding public office—both of which Timarchus had done over the course of his adult life.

What might be the source of this incompatibility between selling sexual favors and participating in politics? Halperin argues that the logic of this law is deeply rooted in the way in which Athenian democracy presupposed and reinforced a certain concept of the citizen’s body. Because of the tendency of economic difference to undermine political equality, the maintenance of democracy required some unassailable limit to the exercise of economic and social power; and

47 Dover, Greek Homosexuality, p.192.
48 In 346 B.C.E. a group of Athenian envoys concluded a peace treaty, on behalf of their city, with Philip II of Macedon. Upon witnessing the poor reception of this treaty within Athens, one of the envoys, Demosthenes, along with a man named Timarchus, instigated a prosecution against the others. As a means of derailing a legal process that might have culminated in his own execution, a second envoy (named Aeschines) preemptively struck against Timarchus, accusing the latter of having prostituted himself in his youth. Aeschines’ tactics seem to have had the desired effect, since he won his case against Timarchus, and was not himself brought to trial for the matter of the treaty until three years later, at which point he was acquitted. Cf. Dover, Greek Homosexuality, pp.19-39 for a detailed discussion of the historical, legal, and textual issues of this case.
49 Although the blame in latter cases (such as the prostitution of a boy by his parents) would fall upon the adult responsible, the same interdictions applied in public life to the one who had been prostituted (that is, whether the prostitution had been voluntary or involuntary made no difference with respect to one’s subsequent right to participate in public life). This rather unjust-seeming law indicates the symbolic importance of the sanctity of bodily limits.
it seems to have constituted that limit—and with it, the distinctive form of Athenian citizenship—largely through the delineation of the citizen’s physical body as “free, autonomous, and inviolable”.\(^{50}\) This process is traceable through the earliest legislation against enslavement, torture, and physical assault \(hybris\) committed against citizens. For a citizen, prostitution (and the transgression of one’s bodily limits it entailed) “signified a refusal of the constitutional safeguards of his bodily integrity…[and] represented a forfeiture of his birthright…to share on an equal basis with his fellow citizens in the government of the city.”\(^{51}\) In principle, the citizen who prostitutes himself has already symbolically renounced his citizenship; in practice, by showing that his autonomy is for sale, he renders himself untrustworthy as an advocate of the city’s interests and therefore must be disqualified from public service.\(^{52}\)

We should note, finally, that this worry about sexual passivity could extend to full citizens who, while avoiding prostitution, nonetheless played (or were reputed to play) a passive role in their sexual relationships with other males. Pederastic practice was haunted by the figure of the \textit{kinaidos}, the physically and emotionally effeminate man who willingly submitted to penetration;\(^{53}\) we see this fear evoked in Socrates’ first speech in the \textit{Phaedrus}, in which he warns the prospective beloved of the future that awaits him at the hands of a lover. Pederasty was supposed to produce good, virile citizens—but at least some people clearly worried that it could also have the converse effect, producing soft, womanly \textit{kinaidoi}. This category, moreover,

\(^{50}\) Halperin, \textit{One Hundred Years of Homosexuality}, p.98.  
\(^{51}\) Halperin, \textit{One Hundred Years of Homosexuality}, pp.96-97.  
\(^{52}\) “No person who prostituted himself could be allowed to speak before the people in the public assembly because his words might not be his own; he might have been hired to say them by someone else, someone whose interests did not coincide with those of Athens, or he might simply want to bring about a political change that would advance his private enterprise at the expense of the public good—servility and greed evidently being the dominant features of his personality” (\textit{One Hundred Years of Homosexuality}, p.98).  
\(^{53}\) Aristophanes depicts Agathon and Cleon as \textit{kinaidoi}; cf. \textit{EMS} pp.107-109 for a detailed discussion of the figure of the \textit{kinaidos} in Aristophanes’ comedies. Wohl (\textit{Love among the Ruins}, ch.2) shows that revulsion toward the “effeminacy” of demagogues such as Cleon was closely connected with fears that the demos itself risked being “feminized” (or even castrated) by its indiscriminate love for demagoguery of the “Cleontic” variety; I will discuss the relationship between \textit{eros} and rhetoric in the following chapter.
implied not just physical but *moral* softness and corruption. To suffer sexual penetration was one of the most demeaning and shameful experiences conceivable for a typical Athenian male, and a symbolic negation of his status as a citizen—what, then, did it mean for a man to *desire* this experience (or at the very least, to undergo it willingly in the service of other desires)? It could only signify such a powerful enslavement to appetite that his motivations for action, particularly within the political sphere, would always remain somewhat suspicious.

It was for such reasons that the relationship between pederastic practice and the larger social assemblage was viewed with ambivalence by those within this assemblage; even its proponents recognized the risks it entailed. As a mechanism of social production, pederasty contained, as one of its most intimate possibilities, the failure or perversion of this production.

*Literacy, poetry, and the concept of *eros*

I would like to investigate, as a final facet of the complex position of pederasty within the classical Athenian assemblage, the role played by the rediscovery of literacy and the emergence of lyric poetry. It is undeniable that a great deal of our understanding of the Greek experience of *eros* depends upon literary remains; what’s perhaps somewhat more controversial is the possibility that the erotic experiences of the ancient Greeks themselves may have been strongly influenced by literary practices. Of course we know that public discourse profoundly shapes even the most personal of experiences. It reveals and legitimizes certain aspects simply by speaking of them, while repressing and concealing other aspects through its silence; exposure to public discourse thus educates the individual as to which types and objects of experience are relevant, and to what extent. Anne Carson, however, points out an intriguing twist in the case of the ancient Greeks, claiming that not simply the content, but the *medium* of public discourse—
specifically, the (re)-introduction of the written word—had a profound impact upon the Greek understanding and experience of *eros*.

To show why this might have been the case, Carson compares the experience of listening to an oral recitation to that of reading a text. In oral recitation, “sounds are being breathed in a continuous stream from the poet’s mouth” into the listener. Reading (and writing), by contrast, separates words from one another, separates words from the environment, separates words from the reader (or writer) and separates the reader (or writer) from his environment. …As separable, controllable units of meaning, each with its own visible boundary, each with its own fixed and independent use, written words project their user into isolation.\(^5^4\)

The human relationship to language seems to disclose different facets of the world depending upon whether it occurs in a written or an oral context. Through the simultaneous deployment of the various boundaries and separations mentioned above, the act of reading and writing reveals a world of edges, and of varying degrees of distance between those edges.

Although epic poetry existed before the rediscovery of writing,\(^5^5\) *lyric* poetry seems to have made its first appearance shortly after the introduction of writing in Greece.\(^5^6\) If we notice vast differences between these two literary forms, says Carson, it is at least in part because “[o]ral cultures and literate cultures do not think, perceive, or fall in love in the same way.”\(^5^7\) She hypothesizes that the experience of writing itself taught lyric poets—and, in turn, their readers—to experience *eros* in unprecedented ways. Calame lends credence to this hypothesis when he notes that epic and lyric forms of *eros* differ primarily with respect to realization or consummation:

"On the one hand, epic represents a love that finds satisfaction…in a reciprocal"

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\(^{55}\) Through the adoption and modification of the Phoenician system of writing in the early eighth century B.C.E.

\(^{56}\) The archaic lyric poets were active beginning in the early seventh century.

\(^{57}\) Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, p.42.
relationship; on the other, [lyric] poetry tells of desire doomed to frustration, given the asymmetric nature of the amorous relationship that it postulates.\textsuperscript{58}

No doubt, the archaic Greeks had already known of unreciprocated attraction. Yet in lyric poetry, already allied through reading and writing to a certain experience of separation, such unrequited \textit{eros} found its ideal form of expression, while lyric poetry simultaneously discovered in unrequited \textit{eros} an ideal content. The lyric poets did not just give voice to a previously marginalized phenomenon; they developed the semantic, affective and conceptual repertoires that would articulate the erotic experiences of subsequent generations.

The spread of pederasty throughout Greece seems to have been roughly contemporaneous with the emergence and dissemination of the lyric style;\textsuperscript{59} yet it would, I think, be a mistake to look for a direct causal relationship between these two phenomena. Rather, it seems to be a case in which diverse elements—a new poetic style and a set of bodily practices—were swept up in a single social assemblage and a reciprocal deterritorialization.

\textit{The deterritorialization of eros}

In what sense, then, are language and \textit{eros} deterritorialized within the ancient Athenian assemblage?

To begin with, we should note that human \textit{eros} already marks a deterritorialization and a decoding with respect to the sexual practices of other animals. According to Michel Serres, human sexuality “bifurcates” from animal sexuality at several distinct points, including the anatomical transition from a four-footed to a two-footed posture (allowing for the innovation of

\textsuperscript{58} Calame, \textit{Poetics of Eros}, p.52.
\textsuperscript{59} Assuming that the consolidation of pederastic practices within the city-states took place in the seventh century.
face to face lovemaking)\textsuperscript{60} and a temporal deterritorialization (whereas the sexual behavior of most animals occurs within distinct—and often infrequent—mating seasons, human beings feel the pangs of desire all year round),\textsuperscript{61} not to mention the general de-specialization in comparison to other animals that renders the human being (in love, as in everything else) uniquely “without program and without limit, excessive and worried, weakling and exterminator, dominant and wretched, marginal, skillful and maladroit like an aged infant.”\textsuperscript{62} In the human being, the coding of desire by certain postures, times, and patterns tends to break down; the distinctive sexual mores of each cultural group comprise efforts to recode this flow of desire, to reterritorialize it upon given societal structures and practices. This movement of decoding and recoding releases certain flows of desire from their confinement upon the organic stratum (sex as a biological function), causing them to leak into the alloplastic stratum (sex as a social, political, ethical, aesthetic, economic, and technological problem).

Now, each type of sexual practice in ancient Athens had a distinctive relationship to territoriality. Although “productive” heterosexual activity took as its territory the oikos or household, the oikos opened up onto the polis as a whole. Even the little threads of desire that were continually escaping the household and the imperative of biological (re)productivity did not escape the polis. We might be startled to discover, included in the list of reforms with which Solon was credited, the establishment of state-funded brothels that made sex democratically available to every citizen.\textsuperscript{63} Far from posing a threat to the integrity of the community, the availability of prostitutes could be praised as an accomplishment of democracy. Though

\textsuperscript{60} Michel Serres, \textit{En amour sommes-nous des betes}? (Paris: Editions le Pommier, 2002), p.24. Serres notes that this innovation is not restricted to human beings, since chimpanzees also practice face-to-face intercourse.


\textsuperscript{62} Serres, \textit{En amour}, pp.30-31; translation mine.

\textsuperscript{63} Cf. Halperin, \textit{One Hundred Years of Homosexuality}, pp.99-103, for an extended discussion of ancient Athenian prostitution.
deterritorialized with respect to the *oikos*, prostitution was reterritorialized upon the *polis*.

With pederasty we discover a similar phenomenon of a deterritorialization from the *oikos* coupled with reterritorialization within the political sphere. The pleasure of the *erastes* was considered socially productive (despite its apparent sterility) since it accompanied the education and social integration of the *eromenos*. Note that the emergence of this form of *eros* also involved both a decoding of sexual activity (such that not simply females, but young males could be appropriate sexual objects for the male citizen), and a complementary recoding (through the requirement of social asymmetry, and the adoption of stereotypical gestures and postures), with a margin of possible mutation (the production of *kinaidoi* rather than “normally” virile citizens; but also, as we will soon see, the production of philosophers).

We have already suggested that poetic language may have undergone a transformation akin to that of erotic practice. Lyric represents a kind of decoding of epic language: as Carson states,

> The diction and meter of lyric poets seems to represent a systematic breakup of the huge floes of Homer’s poetic system. Epic formulas of phrase and rhythm pervade lyric poetry, but they are broken apart and differently assembled in irregular shapes and joins.\(^{64}\)

This process freed lyric language for a new coding (especially in the form of new tropes and metaphors: the madness of *eros*, the proximity of *eros* and its opposite, and especially the concept of *eros* as a melting or flowing experience).\(^{65}\) This stylistic coding goes hand in hand with a deterritorialization in content: although some lyric poetry retains a focus on sweeping stories of gods and heroes, the erotic poetry we tend to associate with Greek lyric abandons this terrain in favor of the first-person experience of a single erotically saturated moment. Finally, lyric poetry helps to code the very erotic relationships that serve as its privileged content,

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\(^{64}\) Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, p.51.

\(^{65}\) Cf Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, pp.3-11, for a survey of the most common tropes of lyric language.
teaching readers the nature and value of their various affects.

In short, both the practices and the language of *eros* were already relatively
deterritorialized, even before the Socratic-Platonic interventions articulated in the *Symposium*
and the *Phaedrus*. And if these dialogues focus upon pederasty as the site of transformation, it is
precisely because this form of *eros* is already highly deterritorialized, with a wide margin of
decoding. The programs proposed in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* aim to push this
deterritorialization still further, uprooting pederasty from the *polis* and bringing it into
conjunction with a new element: philosophy. The figures of the lover and the philosopher will
meet in a becoming-lover of the philosopher and a becoming-philosophical of *eros*. This new
content, in turn, will find its form of expression in the Platonic dialogue, which gathers up and
connects bits of myth, rhetoric, drama, and dialectic to form a functioning philosophical
machine. The details of these transactions differ significantly, however, in the two dialogues.

IV. Deterritorialization in Socratic-Platonic Erotics

*Phaedrus*

The *Phaedrus* takes place under the sign of deterritorialization; Socrates’ first question is
“Where are you going and where have you come from?”—a request, in other words, for a
verbal map of Phaedrus’ movements. Over the course of the dialogue, the relationship between

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66 The question of “who is speaking”, always present in the dialogues, arises with particular intensity with respect
to Socrates' major erotic speeches in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, since in each case he attributes full or partial
authorship to an other (Stesichorus or Diotima, respectively) who is otherwise absent from the dialogue. Even if
read as playfully intended, these disavowals make it problematic to straightforwardly attribute either to the
historical or the literary Socrates the views contained in the speeches (let alone to assume full Platonic
endorsement thereof). To adequately address this question, however, would far exceed the scope of the current
investigation. In Chapter Three I will offer a limited discussion of the issue of authorship as it pertains to the
*eros of logos* and the *logos of eros*; meanwhile, I will periodically refer to the originator of the major erotic
speeches as “Socrates-Stesichorus” or “Socrates-Diotima”, as a reminder of their questionable status.

New York Press, 1993), 227a. All citations for the *Phaedrus* are from this translation, except where noted.
the speakers and their territories undergoes multiple transformations upon several different axes. First, the physical displacement that carries Socrates and Phaedrus away from their accustomed habitat—the agora—into the countryside (to which Socrates at least is a relative stranger). Secondly, a curious temporal dislocation in the setting of the dialogue as a whole: from our knowledge of the whereabouts of the historical Phaedrus and Lysias, it seems that there is no time at which the conversation could ever have taken place (thereby making it impossible to ascribe a dramatic date to the dialogue). Thirdly, the ever-present possibility of erotic abduction: at the edges and within the folds of the dialogue lurk such figures as Boreas and Oreithuia, Paris and Helen, Zeus and Ganymede, and the nameless nymphs to whom Socrates fears falling victim. Fourthly, the deterritorialization of logos that writing is, tearing speech from its home in the ear and vocal apparatus and transplanting it to a physically and temporally more mobile territory (Phaedrus carries with him the speech of Lysias, not in memory—which he admits is imperfect—but in a scroll). Fifthly, the breath of madness that carries the soul to new and unfamiliar resources. Finally, and most importantly, the flight, fall, and becoming-winged of the soul in Socrates’ palinode.

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69 As Cobb writes in his notes to the Phaedrus, “Phaedrus was actually in exile from Athens between 415 and 404…Lysias left Athens as a child and did not return until after 411, and Lysias’ brother Polemarchus [referred to as though alive at 257b] was murdered in 404…” p.193n3. Reminding us that Phaedrus was exiled for the same crime as Alcibiades—the destruction of the herms—Nussbaum makes the intriguing suggestion that, like Stesichorus’ tale of a Helen who never went to Troy, the Phaedrus is Plato’s story of a Phaedrus who did not succumb to an all-too-human mania, and who therefore did not have to go into exile. Cf. Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) pp.212-213.

70 Plato, Phaedrus, 229b-230a.
71 Plato, Phaedrus, 243a-243c.
72 Plato, Phaedrus, 255c.
73 Plato, Phaedrus, 241e-242a.
74 The treatment of the figure of the lover in the three speeches mirrors the dynamic of the scapegoat as it is described by Deleuze-Guattari. Initially the assemblage gives a negative valuation to a particular individual, position, or movement (the non-lover’s description of the lover); then the occupant of this position comes to
These movements effect a displacement of the pederastic relationship and of *eros* itself. We have argued that pederasty functioned within the Athenian assemblage as a mechanism of political production, forming and integrating new citizens; we have also witnessed the potential of this mechanism to malfunction, producing “malformed” individuals who would be citizens in name only. The first two speeches of the *Phaedrus* focus almost exclusively upon the latter possibility, demonstrating that rather than preparing the beloved for full membership within the community, the lover will attempt to sabotage this integration. As Lysias’ non-lover says, not only will the lover ruin a young man’s reputation through indiscretion, but his jealousy will deprive the youth of beneficial acquaintances with other adults, while amorous servility will prevent him from offering needed advice and criticism. To these charges, Socrates’ concealed lover adds those of actively encouraging both intellectual and physical deficiencies in the beloved (so as to produce a stereotypical *kinaidos*), and attempting to thwart the beloved’s eventual acquisition of property, wife, and children (the accoutrements of fully realized male adulthood). Through his involvement with a lover, the young man risks personal damage and public isolation.

The vindication of the lover in the palinode addresses only the former charge (personal damage), explaining that, moved by his recollection of the god he once followed, the lover will not impede his beloved's development, but rather “lead him into the practice and style of the god”; on the other hand, although the negative social effects that dominated the first two speeches are absent here, no positive, integrating social effects emerge in their stead. On the contrary, Socrates-Stesichorus acknowledges the tendency of *eros* to isolate the lovers and to

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75 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 253b-c.
overturn conventional values. Under the sway of eros the lover’s soul not only “forgets mother, brothers, and all associates, and if its property is lost through neglect thinks nothing of it,” but even “despises customary decency and taste”; for his part, the beloved learns to disregard the prevailing bias against lovers, and “discovers that all his other friends and relatives offer no friendship at all in comparison with this friend who is divinely inspired.” We must conclude that Socrates-Stesichorus has no interest here in rehabilitating the political role of pederasty. Though pederasty retains an initiatory character, the initiation itself tears the amorous couple away from the polis, sweeping them toward hyperuranian spaces in a movement from the political to the philosophical.

Inseparable from this deterritorialization is another that concerns eros itself in its relationship to necessity. Although the element of necessity remains veiled in Lysias’ speech, the concealed lover’s speech abounds with references to the rule of ananke. The erotically maddened lover has already relinquished his freedom, preferring enslavement to pleasure over the rule of reason; thus tyrannized, he himself becomes a tyrant to his beloved. Under the law of necessity, desire desires the slavery that it already is. Such desire never strays from the territory it has founded; like the potencies of Schelling’s necessary nature, its circuit has condensed to the smallest possible circumference, a black hole within which there is no

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76 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 252a.
77 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 255a-b.
79 Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 238e (“Anyone ruled by desire…inevitably makes his beloved as delightful to himself as possible…”); 239a (“A lover is bound to be pleased…”); 239b (“…a lover is inevitably jealous…”, and “a lover inevitably keeps his darling away [from philosophy]”), to name only a few instances; in each case the italicized word translates ananke.
80 The view of eros as a tyrant appears prominently in the *Republic*: cf.329c, and especially the analysis of the “tyrannical personality” as one whose soul is enslaved to a single great stinging love (572d-573b). With regard to the problematic relationship between eros and the polis in the *Republic*, Sallis notes that the discussion of the sexual politics of the city becomes a comedy when it attempts “to incorporate the erotic into the city, to politicize eros…[and] by trying to treat ‘erotic necessities’ as though they were ‘geometrical necessities’”; cf. John Sallis, *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), p.378. A questionable conception of the relationship between eros and ananke seems to haunt the politicization of eros.
transformation, and from which there is no escape. The end comes only from an abrupt cessation of the flow of desire, whereupon the lover “recovers his senses” and renounces his love. But at that point the rule of necessity has not been overthrown; it has simply been briefly suspended, until the sight of another beautiful boy begins the cycle anew.

Prior to beginning his recantation, Socrates points out that “love among free men” must look very different from the tyrannical regime he has just described. (Since the speech of the concealed lover expressed conventional views—albeit exaggerated—we can surmise that the participants in a conventional pederastic affair are perhaps less than ideally free, and we might again suspect that the politicization of eros is to blame.) To differentiate between eros and ananke, and to free the flows of desire, requires two things: first, a new understanding of madness; second, a rejection of the economy of pleasure and consumption.

We’ll start with the question of madness (mania). Madness deterritorializes, driving the lover away from his customary responsibilities and making him a creature of thresholds; madness decodes, inspiring indifference towards old valuations and the creation of new ones. In general, madness destratifies, disrupting the lover’s position upon and relation to the alloplastic and even the organic strata. The problem is that none of these phenomena is a priori a good thing, as Deleuze-Guattari warn us: “Staying stratified…is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse” through careless alteration to the course of desire(s). To divert or dam up a river—or, conversely, to open the floodgates—poses certain threats to the stability of the geological assemblage in which it functions, and to intervene in the course of less tangible flows is no less dangerous to the assemblage(s) involved. So it is that the lover of the first two speeches deterritorializes but goes

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82 Cf. the discussion of Alcibiades, pp. 172-187 below, for further exploration of this point.
nowhere, decodes but invents no new coding, disrupts his relationship to his society and his own body (the alloplastic and organic strata, respectively) without discovering new and better ways in which to live.

Why does erotic madness seem to fail so miserably? The concealed lover's initial definition of it provides a clue. *Eros* is desire (*epithymia*), but a desire raised to the power of madness. The concealed lover situates this madness within the broader context of a strife or tension constitutive of the human psyche, between the "innate desire [*epithymia*] for pleasure" and the "acquired judgment [*doxa*] that aims at what is best [*tou aristou*]".\(^{84}\) To follow *doxa* toward what is best is to practice *sophrosune*, self-control; to follow desire and the pleasures it seeks, without reasoning [*alogos*], is to succumb to *hubris*.\(^{85}\) (We have already encountered *hubris* once as the name for the assault upon a citizen’s bodily integrity; here *hubris* names an equally serious attack upon psychic integrity.) To make his point, the concealed lover points to gluttony and alcoholism (or, more descriptively, “dipsomania”) as paradigms of desire run wild. But could it be that his choice of examples has led him to misunderstand the nature of desire? After all, the desires for food and drink are based in (relatively) non-negotiable energetic requirements of the body, with a (relatively) narrow margin for positive deterritorialization; furthermore, each of these desires is organized, at least in this context, upon a model of lack and consumption which orients it toward a specific type of object. The concealed lover seems not to consider the possibility that his examples might be exceptions to the rule. Not all flows of desire are so closely confined to a given stratum; more importantly, desire as such cannot necessarily be defined in terms of its object, much less in terms of the consumption of that object.

It is in order to correct this distorted concept of desire that Socrates-Stesichorus

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\(^{84}\) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 237d-e.

\(^{85}\) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 237e-238a.
introduces his taxonomy of divine madesses. He proposes three distinct lineages of divine mania—prophecy, purification, and poetic creation—with the implication that eros is to take its place alongside them as the fourth. In each of the first three cases, something somehow external to the strata flashes across the complicated conduit that is a human individual, simultaneously displacing human agency and giving rise to deeds that surpass (merely) human capacity. Like its human counterpart, divine madness entails a disruption of the individual’s relation to strata, code, and territory, but in such a way as to reveal and elaborate these latter’s immanent capacities for variation and transformation—for further individuation, in other words. Divine mania slices into the everyday, opening a gap in which it becomes possible to envision and to participate in the reshaping of the world, the self, and the relations between them. Though it cannot free us entirely from necessity, it can afford us a new relationship to it. In the case of desire, this means that the pull of erotic necessity is accompanied by a margin of various possible interpretations and responses.

Which brings us to the issue of pleasure. As we have seen, Deleuze-Guattari mistrust pleasure; why? Because “the process of obtaining it is already a way of interrupting [desire], of instantly discharging it and unburdening oneself of it.” Pleasure tends to neutralize desire’s capacity to escape and transform the strata and assemblages upon which it flows; “pleasures, even the most artificial, are reterritorializations.” It therefore acts as a limiting principle within those erotic situations that privilege it, such as conventional pederasty which aims at the moment

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86 For example, the seer’s gaze is wrenched forcibly away from her own petty affairs and fixed upon those events—past, present, and future—that shape the horizons of her people; the poet takes leave of his everyday perceptions in order to perceive and render perceptible the very flesh and bones of past, present, and future worlds. Sallis makes the intriguing and compelling claim that Socrates’ palinode is itself performative of each of the four types of divine mania; see Being and Logos, pp.134-135. That is, not only does the Socratic logos arise from out of attunement to the exigencies of these madesses, but it composes also an appropriate response to these exigencies, insofar as it opens, in logos, the very spacing at issue. Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p.154/191. Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p.156/193.
when, moved by gratitude, the beloved consents to “gratify” his lover. According to the palinode, however, to seek pleasure in this way is to mistake the nature and true value of eros, such that only one with a deficient memory of his hyperuranian experience would “[abandon] himself to pleasure and [try] to mount others in the manner of a four-footed beast and to sow his seed.”

When erotic initiation succeeds most fully, the lovers refrain from consummating their desire. What is the meaning of this restraint?

The Socratic-Stesichorean program here achieves both a rearticulation of—and a novel solution to—the constitutive problem of pederasty. Conventionally articulated, pederastic eros always runs the risk of undermining the very function it is supposed to fulfill, for the compromise between the lover’s rights and the beloved’s bodily and social integrity is imperfect and fragile. In the palinode, eros takes on a new function, one in which the true work and reward for lover and beloved alike—the becoming-winged of the soul—is already immanent to desire itself, independent of physical consummation. Once the lover’s “gratification” has been taken out of the picture, however, the problematic aspect of pederasty (i.e, the physically passive position of the beloved) also vanishes. Somewhat paradoxically, it is when eros becomes philosophical that the political problem of pederasty finds its solution.

Before moving on, we’d be remiss not to mention a final, highly significant transformation that occurs in this dialogue: the further decoding and recoding of erotic language. For if (as we earlier argued) the lyric language so central to pederastic aesthetics arose out of a deterritorialization and decoding of epic language, the three erotic speeches of the Phaedrus push this process to the limit. As Carson has shown, Lysias’ anti-erotic speech is uprooted from the

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90 Plato, Phaedrus, 250e-251a.
91 The desire described in the palinode is also unique in that it is mutual—an innovation we will discuss in due course.
92 Carson, Eros the Bittersweet, p.126.
territory occupied by lyric poetry, namely, the supersaturated moment of *eros*; lacking this center, the non-lover’s argument seems to meander, repeating its points in no particular order. In the process Lysias has subjected lyric poetry to a further decoding, dissolving into hyperrational prose its rhythms, tropes, and affective charge. Conversely, Socrates’ first speech marks a partial reterritorialization (*eros* is the basis of the concealed lover’s discourse) and recoding (poetic rhythms threaten to erupt throughout\(^ {93}\)) of the language of *eros*,\(^ {94}\) which coexists uncomfortably alongside the language of philosophical argumentation. But all of this is only a prelude to the palinode’s deployment of a powerful new language—a language of *philosophical eros* that gathers philosophical argument, myth, poetry, rhetoric, and even dialogue\(^ {95}\) into a heterogeneous but cohesive unity. Like the *Phaedrus* as a whole, the palinode works precisely *not* by virtue of a consistent rhetorical overcoding, but rather through the careful combination of differently-coded fragments, each of which acquires new meaning through its relation to the others (the proof of the soul’s immortality, for example, owes much of its unique meaning to its close connection with the image of the chariot and the myth of the soul's flight and cyclical reincarnations).

**Symposium**

The *Symposium* appears simultaneously more and less deterritorialized than the *Phaedrus*, a fact which is first apparent in the framing technique and spatio-temporal cues employed by Plato. The reader receives this account several times removed from its purported source, since it must first pass through Aristodemus and Apollodorus (not to mention the latter’s interlocutor), with ample opportunity for omission, elaboration, and variation at each stage. The situation is compounded

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\(^{93}\) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 283d, 241e.

\(^{94}\) His reference at 235c to “the beautiful Sappho or the wise Anacreon” as possible sources for his speech signals this partial return to lyric territory.

\(^{95}\) I have in mind here the exchange between the charioteer and the dark horse.
by a temporal distance between the framing and inner dialogues, revealed when Apollodorus chides his companion for thinking that the dinner party to be recounted had been a recent event. On the other hand, with his reference to Agathon’s victory, Plato makes it easy for us to fix a dramatic date to this dinner party: 416 B.C.E, not long before the infamous mutilation of the Herms. We stand, therefore, at a greater distance relative to the action; but the action itself, as situated at a determinate point in time, is to that extent immeasurably closer to us than the temporally impossible Phaedrus. Spatially, the text expresses a similarly complex relationship to territoriality. The framing dialogue between Apollodorus and his unnamed interlocutor takes place while the speakers are in transit beyond the boundaries, but moving in the direction of the city; similarly, the inner dialogue begins with two speakers (Socrates and Aristodemus) in transit, but within the city, and they soon come to a rest at Agathon’s house where they will remain until the end of the dialogue.

As was the case in the Phaedrus, the discussion of eros takes the form of several speeches, beginning with conventionally coded erotic experience. It displays, however, a much wider margin of variation than the other dialogue, owing to the greater number of speeches and diversity of speakers. We could say that the Symposium is governed by a dispute over the territoriality and coding of eros and Eros, each speaker striving to establish an alliance with the god. We should also observe that the Symposium’s central question differs from that of the Phaedrus. Whereas the erotic speeches of the latter took shape around the specific problem of pederastic eros, the speeches of the Symposium, ostensibly in praise of Eros and eros, serve in fact to put in question the nature and value of erotic experience in general and as such.

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96 Nussbaum hypothesizes that the framing dialogue is set just after the murder of Alcibiades in 404 BCE; this, she argues, would explain the interest that a dinner party of yore would have held not only for Apollodorus’ unnamed interlocutor, but for Glaucon in the earlier conversation to which Apollodorus refers (cf. Fragility of Goodness, pp.167-170).
The first two speakers, Phaedrus and Pausanias, praise conventional pederasty on conventional grounds. Speaking from the beloved’s point of view, Phaedrus extols the benefits a boy receives from his lover, with emphasis upon the transmission of a particular set of values, namely, “shame in the face of shameful things and honorable ambition in the face of beautiful things.”97 He points out the function of pederastic eros within the military sphere and situates the relationship between lover and beloved within a lineage of mythical couples, including Achilles and Patroclus.98 Yet his successor Pausanias recognizes that this praise of eros oversimplifies even the conventional views on the subject. He admits that eros presents itself as an irreducible multiplicity of possible relationships, practices, effects and affects of such varying quality that one must first discern the “true” or “higher” form of eros before one can unequivocally praise it. The remainder of his speech is taken up by his (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to accomplish this task. The noble eros is supposed to preside over a transmission of virtue from lover to beloved; unfortunately, virtue is exceptionally difficult to discern and authenticate, especially before one has become intimately involved with the individual in question. But in the absence of any guarantees for the prospective lover or beloved as to the virtue of his partner, there seems little reason for the beloved to submit (if not for the sake of more tangible benefits), and little reason for the lover to pursue (if not for the sake of sexual gratification). In practice, therefore, Pausanias’ criterion is of little use in distinguishing between noble and base erotic liaisons until it is too late, and his failure to solve or even to minimize the constitutive problem of pederasty reflects the helplessness of conventional pederastic discourse in this regard.

97 Plato, Symposium, 178d-e.
98 As Rosen points out, however, this lineage is not exactly an overwhelming vindication of pederastic eros, since two of the relationships (Alcestis and Admetus, Orpheus and Eurydice) involve men and women, and of these, one marks a failure of eros (according to Phaedrus’ take on the myth, Orpheus fails in his quest and is condemned to death because of his cowardly unwillingness to die for his beloved). Cf. Stanley Rosen, Plato’s Symposium (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine’s Press, 1999), pp.54-59.
The next three speakers expand the scope of *eros* beyond the relationship between lover and beloved. The physician Eryximachus recognizes that *eros* operates upon every level of being, from bodily processes to the passage of the seasons, and that the pederastic assemblage and its flows of desire are always open to a vaster cosmic assemblage. Ultimately, however, he grants this supremacy to desire only in order to proclaim his own supremacy as physician—which here means the master or manager of all desires (for like Pausanias, he posits the existence of an *eros* that is multiple and thus eminently in need of management). Using human health and pleasure as his standard, the physician distinguishes between “orderly” and “disorderly” loves, but cannot guarantee that the former will prevail: at every level desire seems equally prone to desire what is beneficial and what is harmful for human beings. Only the physicians of the world are competent to cultivate erotic flows so as to produce a maximally beneficial result. In short, then, Eryximachus deterritorializes *eros* from the pederastic relationship and from its strictly political—or even alloplastic and organic—functions, only to reterritorialize it immediately upon the *techne* of medicine.\(^99\)

Aristophanes takes a very different approach. Of all the speakers thus far, he is the first who does not focus upon the divine lineage of Eros, choosing instead to show how *eros* emerges historically for human beings. He also departs from the preceding speakers in his more or less exclusive focus upon the Olympian, rather than the Titanic gods.\(^100\) Here is a first reterritorialization: whereas the earlier speakers tacitly granted Eros precedence over the divinities traditionally worshipped within the *polis*, Aristophanes forcibly resituates the

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\(^99\) Over the course of his speech, Eryximachus reduces the *techne* of music, agriculture, astronomy, and even prophecy to the art of managing desires.

\(^100\) Following Hesiod, Phaedrus makes Eros one of the very oldest gods, younger only than Chaos and coeval with Earth (178b-c), while Pausanias takes the variants of Aphrodite’s story as license to posit two erotic principles, the “heavenly” Aphrodite (born of Ouranos’ severed genitals) and the “common” (daughter of Zeus and Dione), giving precedence to the former (180d-e). Although Eryximachus does not explicitly give a lineage for Eros, he implicitly accedes to Pausanias’ account by stating that the latter “made a fine start to his speech” (185e-186a).
experience of *eros* within the civic religious framework. According to his story, we experience *eros* because our ancestors, the circle-people, challenged the gods for cosmic supremacy and lost. As a punishment for our hubris and a safeguard against its repetition, Zeus split each of the offending parties in two, whereupon the severed halves were immediately seized with longing for each other and entered into fatally permanent embraces. In order to prevent the extinction of the race (and the consequent drying up of the flow of sacrifices), Zeus reordered human physiology, repositioning the genitals so that these embraces would lead to the satiation—that is, the interruption—of desire in pleasure and reproduction.

Notice the implication of this story. Not only does human desire (*epithumia*) \(^{101}\) arise from out of a radical *lack* that is itself a punishment, it is initially a *threat* to the very existence of human beings, precisely to the extent that it cannot be satiated. Zeus solves this dilemma by limiting desire and making it discontinuous: he reterritorializes it upon genitality, reproduction, and pleasure. Only after this reterritorialization has been achieved does Aristophanes use the word *eros* to describe the experience of the severed halves. For him *eros* seems to name a desire that has already been appropriately domesticated. \(^{102}\)

Before we write off Aristophanes as a psychoanalyst *avant la lettre*, however, we must recognize the extent to which he seems simultaneously to deny the possibility of such domestication. Take the passage in which Hephaestus offers to grant permanent union to a pair of mortal lovers. Aristophanes preempts the answer the lovers themselves might have given, saying breezily that “there would not be even one” who would refuse such an offer. \(^{103}\) Yet as Carson

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\(^{101}\) The word used to express the “longing” of each half for its other is the participle *epithumountes*, from the verb *epithumeo*; cf. Plato, *Symposium* 191a.

\(^{102}\) When we examine the erotic program proposed in the *Phaedrus* in light of Aristophanes’ myth, the former appears strikingly hubristic: in deferring physical consummation and sustaining *eros* as long as possible, the lovers in the palinode cause their desire to overflow its divinely appointed limits, thereby enjoying and profiting from the very situation initially imposed upon them as punishment for and safeguard against hubris.

\(^{103}\) Plato, *Symposium* 192d-e.
notes, we have good reason to doubt the credibility of this claim; not only is Hephaestus himself an unlikely poster-boy for conjugal bliss, but the original circle-people were not “perfectly content rolling about the world in prelapsarian oneness”—rather, they risked everything in a cosmic coup d’état. And what could have motivated this uprising, if not a desire of some kind? Desire, then, is not rooted in lack, and seems to escape any attempt to confine it to a given stratum (the organic) and function (fulfillment of lack in pleasure and reproduction).

When Agathon speaks the terrain shifts yet again. Like Phaedrus, Agathon is a beloved, despite his advanced age; it’s therefore not surprising that, like Phaedrus, he valorizes the position of the beloved in his speech. As a matter of fact, he goes one step further, not just making of Eros himself the ultimate beloved, but making the god in his own image. Agathon’s Eros is young and “gentle” or “delicate” (the Greek here is malakos, a term more often applied pejoratively to kinaidoi); in addition to his visible beauty, the god is equipped with the four cardinal virtues (justice, temperance, courage, and wisdom); finally, the god is a poet, master not just of language but of “every kind of musical making.” Eros is Agathon, as he is or would like to be (or at any rate would like to be seen). For all its narcissism and sophistical reasoning, however, Agathon’s speech is perhaps the most deterritorializing thus far. Not only does it attempt to focus upon desire itself, without defining it in terms of a determinate object (nowhere does Agathon mention what Eros himself desires), but it also shows the ubiquity of erotic flows

104 Carson, Eros the Bittersweet, pp.67-68.
105 We hear via Aristodemus that “when Agathon had finished speaking, all those present applauded vigorously, as the youth had spoken in a way as suited to himself as to the god” (198a-b).
106 “He is the youngest and the most gentle [malakotatoi]...” (195e). I am indebted to Thornton for this point; cf. Eros, p.197.
107 Like his arguments in support of Eros’ beauty, the arguments concerning virtue seem shaky. For example, Eros is said to be just because he neither suffers nor inflicts violence, but rather obtains the willing agreement of all those who serve him (196b-c); this argument fails to address whether Eros ought to rule in the first place, and whether those who ought to be ruled are in any position to know best who ought to rule them, questions that elsewhere play a central role in Plato’s discussions of justice.
108 Plato, Symposium, 196e.
in every act of production (*poiesis* in general). Finally, it draws the connection between erotic experience and language; Eros *sings* to us, “charming [our] thought”\(^{109}\)—just as Agathon himself has attempted to do with his poetry, and attempts now to do with his speech.

In fact, more than a poet, Agathon’s Eros is a rhetorician, even a Sophist. But it is Socrates, not Agathon, who points out one of the most striking traits of sophistical *eros*, which is that the flow of language in which it finds expression goes only one way. Punning on the name of Agathon’s teacher, Socrates confesses that the tragedian’s speech “reminded me of Gorgias…I was afraid that Agathon in his speech would at last send the head of the dread speaker Gorgias against my speeches and turn me to very stone in speechlessness.”\(^{110}\) What threatens to immobilize the Socratic *logos*? It’s neither the formal beauty nor the exhaustiveness of Agathon’s speech, but rather the fact that, at least from Socrates’ perspective, the speech has not told the truth about its subject. To make matters worse, something about the specific way in which the speech strays from the truth has blocked Socrates’ discursive line of flight (“I almost ran off and was gone in shame—if I had any place to go”).\(^{111}\) He must therefore have recourse to his trusty elenchus, which seems to make short work of Agathon’s position, thereby clearing the way for Socrates to advance new claims.

Before we follow him, however, we need to determine just what it is about Agathon’s speech that is so problematic for Socrates. Socrates is not the first speaker to disagree, in whole or in part, with what has come before—on the contrary, every speaker after Phaedrus has introduced substantive revisions to the preceding positions. Even Aristophanes—hardly an avid supporter of Eryximachus’ views, judging by his snide remarks about the doctor’s cure for

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\(^{109}\) Plato, *Symposium*, 197e.

\(^{110}\) Plato, *Symposium*, 198c-d. The reference is of course to the Gorgon; cf. Rosen, *Plato’s Symposium*, pp.204-205 for a discussion of the mythical backdrop to this passage.

\(^{111}\) Plato, *Symposium*, 198c.
hiccup 

— is content simply to warn his listeners that his speech will be “in a somewhat different vein” from those that preceded it. Why does Socrates need to begin by utterly discrediting Agathon’s position?

The answer will perhaps become clearer if we consider what makes Agathon’s speech initially plausible, even appealing—for it convinces and appeals to a greater extent than we would expect of an argument that is simply false. Socrates’ admission to having once held similar views suggests a kind of inevitability in this mistake (if it is truly a mistake) in our thinking about eros. For all its limitations, Agathon’s position does arise from some genuine erotic experience. And what might that experience be? It’s the experience of the lover as he gazes at his beloved (the identity of lover and beloved in Agathon’s case is what lends his speech its aura of self-absorption). If his description confers all beauty, power, virtue and autonomy upon the beloved, it’s because this is how it often genuinely seems in a love affair, especially as conventionally articulated. Nor does this experience appear to be objectionable to Socrates, if the palinode is any indication (remember the lover who is “awestruck” in the face of his beloved, “as though he were gazing upon a god”). The problem is that in making of Eros an apotheosized beloved, Agathon has territorialized human eros upon the position of human beloveds (such as himself), rendering secondary or even superfluous the experiences of lovers—of those who actually undergo eros, rather than passively emanating its power and profiting from

112 “It [the hiccuping] has stopped, to be sure; not, however, before sneezing had been applied to it. So I wonder at the orderly decency of the body desiring such noises and garglings as a sneeze is...” (Plato, Symposium, 189a-b). I agree with Rosen that this puts into question the merit of Eryximachus’ argument: “The cure rests upon the love of opposites, whereas Eryximachus found health...in the love of similars” (Rosen, Plato’s Symposium, p.133).

113 Plato, Symposium, 189c.

114 At the very least, it shows that this view is not simply a consequence of Agathon’s narcissism.

115 Calame explains that according to a common trope in lyric poetry, “it is in the eyes of the man or the woman who arouses the libido that Eros is most likely to dwell” (Poetics of Eros, p.20). Eros emanates from the beloved, operating upon the lover from afar, even while the beloved himself remains erotically unmoved.

116 Plato, Phaedrus, 251a-b.
its effects. Diotima sums up the nature of Agathon’s mistake:

…you believed…that the beloved is Eros, and is not that which loves. It is for this reason, I believe, that Eros seemed to you to be wholly beautiful. For the beloved thing is truly beautiful, delicate, perfect, and most blessed; but that which loves has another kind of look…\(^{117}\)

For the Socratic-Diotimic program, the identification of \(\text{eros}\) with the beloved is untenable (as we shall soon see). To conceive the existing erotic regime along these lines would utterly block the deterritorialization or transformation Socrates will now attempt.

\[\text{A brief excursus upon eros and lack}\]

Before commencing his own speech, Socrates obtains Agathon’s agreement to the premises that 1) \(\text{eros}\) is relational (Love is a love of something rather than nothing), and 2) \(\text{eros}\)—and by extension, the god Eros, as well as the human lover—loves and desires that which he does not possess (specifically, both what is good and what is beautiful). About this latter claim we should say a few words.

Obviously Socrates has situated us once more within the lover’s perspective upon the conventional pederastic relationship—the lover, who sees himself as lacking not only the fleeting beauty of youth, but any physical charm that could appeal to the beloved (who, as we saw above, must almost by definition remain unmoved by erotic desire for his lover).\(^{118}\) Socrates then appeals to an analogy with other “goods”—namely, health, strength, and wealth—to support his contention that desire is lack. This analogy, however, is seriously flawed. Presumably the weak person who desires strength desires to be strong himself, not simply to have erotic relations with a strong person, and the same holds true of health and wealth. Conversely, the lover’s desire for

\(^{117}\) Plato, Symposium, 204c.

\(^{118}\) As Socrates has his concealed lover remark in the Phaedrus, “The beloved must look at a face that is old and past its prime, and other things that go along with that which it is unpleasant even to hear talked about, let alone to deal with when one is constantly compelled to confront them” (240d-e).
his beloved does not seem reducible to a desire to regain his own lost youthful beauty. Socrates’ conclusion that desire stems from or consists in a lack of what is desired therefore relies upon two highly questionable premises: first, that *eros* as such follows the pederastic model (with its unequal distribution of physical charms), and second, that “possessing” the beautiful, in the sense of erotically encountering it, is equivalent to possessing beauty as a personal quality.

Is the argument therefore false? Not precisely. Having gotten the desired concessions out of Agathon, Socrates breaks off that exchange, but the subsequent account of his conversation with Diotima picks up the argument at precisely the same point. She does so in order to add that love—and the lover’s—lack of beauty and goodness is not unequivocal: there is a middle ground between beauty and ugliness, and it is this space that the lover and his desire inhabit. If we take the figure of Eros as an embodiment of the force and phenomenon of *eros*, then his intermediate status, between beauty (and goodness, and knowledge) and ugliness (and badness, and ignorance), confirms what emerged earlier in the speeches of Pausanias and Eryximachus: *eros* is intrinsically ambiguous, especially with regard to its ethical (but also perhaps its aesthetic and epistemic) value(s). If what holds true for Eros holds true for lovers in general, then the lover’s liminality shows that whatever the relationship between beauty (or goodness, or truth) and its apparent opposite may be, it cannot be a simple lack or negation, but rather a matter of degree, or even—perhaps—of an intensively differentiated continuum. *Eros* concerns lack only to the extent that a lesser degree of temperature, say, or pressure, could be said to be “lacking” in relation to a greater degree. More relevant than the “lack” of the one with respect to the other would be the simple, intensive *difference* between them. (As we saw last chapter, such intensive

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119 When Agathon admits his inability to refute Socrates, the latter replies that it is the truth, rather than Socrates, that Agathon cannot refute (201c-d). Although this sounds like a typical Socratic disavowal of knowledge, we could also take it as an admission that Socrates’ present argument could be refuted. Rosen argues, albeit on somewhat different grounds, that Agathon does not need to agree to Socrates’ conclusion (namely, that Eros lacks beauty and goodness); cf. Rosen, *Plato’s Symposium*, p.220.
differences populate and animate systems of individuation, a point about which we will have a lot to say in the next chapter.

There is a second way in which we could understand the lover’s lack with respect to the object of his desire. As soon as we extend the category of the beautiful to include souls as well as bodies, the claim that the lover desires something he lacks runs into a quandary: Socrates loves not only young men bearing the physical beauty he lacks, but also youths with beautiful souls—surely something he himself possesses to an eminent degree. In other words, what would Socrates receive from his interaction with, say, Theaetetus, that his own soul could not provide? What matters is not access to some determinate quantity of beauty, but rather a certain kind of encounter with the beautiful—an encounter presumably impossible or unlikely in the case of one’s own beauty, such as it may be. In other words, it is only in our encounters with a beauty exterior or other to us that our fecundity bears fruit, and we might suspect that this is because intensive difference is the source of any individuation.

Next chapter we’ll discuss these matters in greater detail. For now, we’ve at least seen that eros does not simply amount to the lack of a desired object, quality, or experience. We can therefore resume our survey of deterritorialized and deterritorializing elements and movements in the dialogue.

Symposium, continued.

Like the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates’ speech features a double spatio-temporal displacement. He starts with the temporal shift of recollection, returning to the scene of the erotic instruction he received as a younger man. Although he did not leave Athens for his lessons, his teacher was herself a foreigner, hailing from Mantinea; add to this her unusual status both as a
woman and as a prophet or oracle, and she appears as a highly deterritorialized element in the
dialogue. The knowledge she bears is thus foreign (or deterritorialized) in relation both to
Socrates and to the current guests at Agathon’s banquet—and in more ways than one: it is foreign
to them as mortals, as males, and as Athenian citizens. Next, within the context of Diotima’s
instruction, a second displacement casts us further back through time and space to the threshold
of a different banquet long ago, immediately prior to the conception and birth of Eros himself. Of
course we soon return, both from the feast of the gods and from the days of Socrates’ youth, and
this return—following upon the transmission of the foreign knowledge from Diotima to Socrates,
and from Socrates to the company at Agathon’s—marks the corresponding reterritorialization of
this knowledge upon mortal, masculine, Athenian society. In the process, however, the foreign
knowledge gives rise to conceptual deterritorializations, specifically with respect to the nature,
object and purpose of eros.

Let’s start with a couple of obvious changes to the figure of the god. Where the other
speakers called him a great god, sometimes to the point of proclaiming his supremacy over the
Olympian order, Diotima demotes Eros to the status of a daimon. Son of two minor gods (his
mother Penia presumably received no invitation to the banquet, since she arrived there in order to
beg at the door), Eros does not dwell upon Mount Olympus, but rather is “always lying on the

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120 In addition to establishing Diotima’s credentials as a prophet—that is, as a conduit between gods and mortals—
Socrates’ mention of her role in postponing the plague of 430 is perhaps also a more general endorsement of the
relevance and efficacy of this knowledge from afar (while simultaneously acknowledging its limitations, since
the plague was only postponed, not averted). Benardete suggests, however, in the accompanying essay to his
translation of the Symposium, that the postponement of the plague may not have been the boon it seems. “Rather
than the plague exhausting itself in an uncrowded city, Diotima’s action served to multiply its virulence when all
the country people had been jammed into Athens at the start of the Peloponnesian War.... If Diotima had not
interfered...Athens would have almost completely recovered from the plague by the start of the war, and its
outcome would fairly certainly have been an Athenian victory”; cf. Seth Benardete, “On Plato’s Symposium,” in Plato’s

121 Eros’ father, Poros, is said to descend from Metis (“Cunning” or “Invention”); the latter was a Titan, coeval
with Zeus, who in fact married her, swallowed her, and subsequently gave birth himself to Athena. Now, Zeus
devoured Metis because of a warning from Ge and Ouranos that she was destined to bear a son who would
supplant him, which leads us to wonder, somewhat playfully, whether Poros—or, better yet, Eros—might be
some version of this foretold usurper.
ground without a blanket or a bed, sleeping in doorways and along waysides in the open air."

Whether this is in addition to or simply in fulfillment of his role as go-between (to which his daimonic status assigns him), the important thing is that he is homeles,

that is, more or less permanently deterritorialized (at least relative to most gods and mortals). Where is the proper territory of Eros? Nowhere, or everywhere—the god is a vagabond.

The true object of eros appears equally elusive, at least initially. Does eros seek beauty, or the good? It’s clear to Socrates that the lover of beautiful things wants to possess these things, but not so clear what the lover would gain thereby—“I was hardly capable of giving a ready answer to this question,” he admits later. Only when Diotima substitutes “good things” for “beautiful things” is Socrates able to respond that the one possessing such things will be happy. Diotima then concludes that “eros is the whole desire of good things and of being happy,” and in doing so she drops the thread of “sexual” desire back into the undifferentiated tangle of desire as such: all of this is eros. But now it’s no longer clear either what beauty has to do with happiness, or in what way the desire inspired by a beautiful boy—a desire bearing as much torment as sweetness, as the poets attest—can lead to the good of the lover. Or, for that matter, why this particular form of eros was privileged to receive the name of the whole.

To explain the nature and the primacy of eros in the narrower sense, Diotima must reintroduce the problem of beauty. In this context she also reveals a new object of desire: immortality. It’s initially ambiguous whether this is simply a modality of our possession of the

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122 Plato, Symposium, 203d.
123 Plato, Symposium, 203d. The Greek here is aoikos.
124 In this respect he resembles both Socrates the atopotatos—the “most lacking in place”—and the stranger Diotima, each of whom, as a transmitter of foreign knowledge, plays a daimonic role in the dialogue. (To a much lesser extent, barefoot and unlovely Aristodemus also acts the messenger, between Socrates and Agathon upon the former’s arrival at the banquet (174e), and between the various speakers at the banquet and the narrator of the dialogue.)
125 Plato, Symposium, 204d-e.
126 Plato, Symposium, 205d.
good (as suggested by her statement that “eros is of the good’s being one’s own always”\textsuperscript{127}) or whether immortality comprises a separate good in itself (“it is for the sake of immortality that this zeal and eros attend everything,”\textsuperscript{128} she later remarks). In any case—and regardless of whether or not every good can be assimilated to immortality, or can constitute the sort of thing with respect to which immortal possession would be a relevant desire—the emphasis promptly shifts to immortality as the deepest yearning of all mortal beings. To wit, everything desires immortality; mortal things achieve immortality only through “procreation and giving birth”; giving birth can take place only “in the beautiful”; therefore eros seeks beauty.

Let’s pause for a minute to catch our breath. What just happened? At the beginning of the speech immortality was not even a factor. It entered the picture not as an independent object of desire, but merely as one aspect of the way in which we desire to possess the good. As soon as the talk turns to procreation and giving birth, however, immortality became not just an independent good but the chief good, and hence the supreme object of mortal desire. That living things desire to produce and to reproduce is uncontroversial; that the procreative drive tends (at times) to override all other considerations, hardly less so; but the identification of procreation and its desire with the chief good is highly debatable.

Diotima and Socrates’ strategy appears more clearly when we draw a map of the territorial movements involved. Socrates wishes to establish an alliance between Eros and philosophy: philosophers are lovers, Eros himself is a philosopher. But such an alliance will have limited use unless he can clear up the ambiguity concerning the ethical value of eros, assigning it a wholly positive valuation (insofar as it is possible to do so). Unsettled by these concerns, the true object of eros is in flight throughout Diotima’s lesson. Who or what is the true beloved? Is it

\textsuperscript{127} Plato, Symposium, 206a.
\textsuperscript{128} Plato, Symposium, 208b.
the beautiful boy? No, it’s good things generally; or rather, the immortal possession of these good things; or rather, immortality as such—hence procreation, and hence beauty once more, but a beauty that transcends and exceeds that of a beloved boy. We seem to have traveled in a circle, but only for the sake of the erotic program that is subsequently unveiled, drawing a line of flight—the so-called “ladder of love”—from the boy to Beauty itself.

The lover’s relation to this fugitive erotic object undergoes an equivalent shift. Initially described in terms of possession, the erotic relation is abruptly recast as one of genesis, which is itself conceived—along with other forms of production—according to the model of biological re-production. This is a tactical reterritorialization. On the one hand, the new model privileges biological productivity over its political counterpart, thereby threatening the erotic interests of the pederasts. On the other hand, reproduction is itself deterritorialized, liberated from the organic stratum (genesis not simply in and through bodies, but via logos and social practices as well). This transformation not only marginalizes the possibility of sterile or unproductive eros, but also broadens the definition of productivity so as to encompass philosophical activity. It’s good news for the pederasts, whose erotic privileges are thus reinstated under the new regime; better news for the philosopher, however, whose particular brand of desire takes the laurel, not just as the highest expression of pederastic desire, but also as the highest form of production.129

Let’s conclude, for the moment, with a reflection upon the remarkably positive valuation of eros implicit in the Socratic-Diotimic program. This is no small feat, considering the handicaps imposed by Diotima’s initial portrait of Eros. Her characterization of the daimon as neither good, nor beautiful, nor wise, with the occupations of “skilled magician, druggist, [and]

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129 Unfortunately we lack the space here to discuss one of the more curious consequences of the Socratic program, namely, the diagnosis of erotic desire as a symptom of “pregnancy”. Let it suffice to say that Socrates detaches the phenomenon of pregnancy from its usual site upon the organic stratum, and from its usual coding as feminine, in order to envision a fecundity transcending both gender and biology.
sophist” [deinos goes kai pharmakeus kai sophistes]\(^{130}\) featuring prominently on his resume, shows both the ambiguity of *eros* and the ambivalence with which it was traditionally regarded. “Magician”, “druggist”, “sophist”: profoundly double-edged words, the lot of them, especially as they pass through Socrates’ lips; and the word *deinos*, with its multiple senses of “skilled or clever”, but also “terrible,” “powerful,” and “wondrous” or “strange”, only sharpens the more subversive edge of this description. Nor does the account of Eros’ favorite activity (“plot[ting] to trap the beautiful and the good”) inspire much confidence in this schemer’s intentions.\(^{131}\) Finally, the repeated references\(^ {132}\) to the daimon’s spendthrift ways cast serious doubts upon the possibility of harnessing his forces for productive purposes—his seems to be a case of “too much or not enough”, always excessive or deficient with respect to the needs of the individual or the *polis*. How, then, can we trust Eros or *eros* to lead us into situations that are beneficial rather than harmful to ourselves and others—and how can we trust him to linger long enough for us to accomplish anything once we’ve arrived?

Fortunately, the introduction of the reproductive model ameliorates these problems. For one thing, it shows us the rationale behind what looks like divine caprice. Lovers are famously fickle—why? Because their pregnant state drives them to seek out any and all beautiful bodies. Furthermore, this model blesses every union with the seal of natural necessity; we can trust the even the more peculiar urgings of *eros*, since they simply express our innate reproductive impulse (itself oriented toward immortality, the highest good). As for the commonly acknowledged risks of *eros*—especially for the beloved—Socrates and Diotima have nothing

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\(^{130}\) Plato, *Symposium*, 203e.

\(^{131}\) As Rosen says, “The emphasis throughout [Diotima’s description of Eros] is upon trickery, and even worse. [Eros] does not love the beautiful and good, but he is skillful in plotting to possess them.” Although Eros is certainly *needy*, this “is scarcely a guarantee of merit...Whether this appetite deserves or is capable enough to be filled up is another question, which cannot be answered merely by pointing to the existence of need” (Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, p.235).

\(^{132}\) See especially 203c-d (“He is always poor” and “he has the nature of his mother, always dwelling with neediness”) and 203e (“that which is supplied to him is always gradually flowing out”).
whatsoever to say. In contrast to the *Phaedrus* (and no doubt at least partly as a concession to an audience composed primarily of dedicated pederasts), Socrates-Diotima’s program does not prohibit or even restrict physical intercourse between lover and beloved. Granted, the boy who is “beautiful in soul” might receive an education from his philosophically-inclined lover, but only as a side-effect of the latter’s personal development—and even this much is by no means guaranteed by the program, since presumably many “initiates” never progress beyond the appreciation of beautiful bodies. The positive valuation of *eros* implicit in the “ladder of love” therefore depends upon a strategic narrowing of focus to include the lover’s good alone.

*Two erotic programs*

If we compare the program proposed by Socrates in the *Symposium* to that elaborated in the *Phaedrus*, striking differences emerge. On the one hand, the *Symposium* seems to go further in the direction of deterritorialization, since it quickly abandons “conjugalilty” with respect both to the content and the expression of erotic practice: because the object of love (the beautiful), though itself singular, is multiply-incarnated, the lover’s attentions must follow a continuous line of flight and a continuous process of engendering and giving birth. At any given point on the “ladder of love”, it seems that *eros* will involve the lover in any number of different ways (expression) with any number of different elements of the assemblage (content), producing both new elements (such as new bodies or new *logoi*) and new relations between these elements (bringing himself and his beloved(s) into philosophical relation with the cosmos). On the other hand, although the program of the *Phaedrus* retains the form of conjugality (that is, a long-term relationship between lover and beloved), it does so, perhaps, only in order to grant a positive function to *eros* itself, as such, independent of any mechanism of production or reproduction.
The lovers of the *Phaedrus* produce nothing for the *polis*, and their desire is not a means to an end, but is rather itself already the becoming-winged of the soul.

The two programs also take their bearings within dissimilar sets of metaphysical coordinates. Standard Platonic entities such as the soul, the Ideas or Forms, and the gods look quite different when we compare the two dialogues, and these differences make a difference for the erotic theories and techniques that Socrates can advocate. We’ll summarize the status of these entities, beginning with the soul.

The palinode precedes its account of love with a “proof” for the immortality of the soul. Although it’s certainly debatable whether we the readers are supposed to take this proof at face value, Socrates’ immediate audience, Phaedrus, does not contest it. Once immortality has been established as an essential and non-negotiable attribute of the human soul, the imperative to achieve immortality (through productive activity, for instance) ceases to be a factor in our possible accounts of *eros*. The only production that counts is the growth of wings, a process immanent to the experience of *eros* itself. In contrast, the *Symposium* is far more reserved with respect to the relationship between mortals and immortality. Diotima states unequivocally that mortal nature “is capable of immortality only in this way, the way of generation,” and makes clear that the soul is not exempt from the need for constant renewal. Nowhere does she promise any immortality for the soul beyond the immortality by proxy achievable through the production of physical and psychical offspring. For the initiate who succeeds in begetting virtue in conjunction with the beautiful itself, she can promise only that “it lies within him to become

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133 Cf. Sallis, *Being and Logos*, pp.135-140, for a discussion of this proof and an argument that it (intentionally) fails to demonstrate the soul’s immortality.

134 Plato, *Symposium*, 207d.

135 “And this is so not only in terms of the body but also in terms of the soul: [the individual’s] ways, character, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears, each of these things is never present as the same for each, but they are partly coming to be and partly perishing” (Plato, *Symposium*, 207d).
dear to god and, if it is possible for any human being, to become immortal as well.”\textsuperscript{136}

In both dialogues, \textit{eros} is shown ultimately to receive its orientation from something transcending individual earthly beings, viz., the “Ideas” or “Forms”.\textsuperscript{137} The palinode tells us a story familiar from other dialogues: beyond the earthly spatiotemporal horizon (literally, “beyond the heavens”) exist “the things that really are,” including beauty, justice, and judiciousness or temperance [\textit{sophrosune}]; human beings are those who caught at least a glimpse of these things, the memory of which guides not only their erotic behavior, but also every act of human understanding.\textsuperscript{138} Now, although the beautiful, as described by Diotima, sounds very similar to these beings beyond the heavens, it does not appear in the company of other such beings (rather, it is said to be “alone by itself and with itself”),\textsuperscript{139} nor is the initiate supposed to have already had some experience of it as a precondition for his or her humanity. On the contrary, access to the beautiful itself becomes possible for the first time only toward the end of Diotima’s erotic program, as the culmination of extensive study of its concrete instantiations. On the other hand, if the initiate does succeed in catching an unmediated glimpse of the beautiful, it will at least be during his or her (mortal, finite) lifetime—which is more than the lovers in the palinode can hope for.\textsuperscript{140}

Finally, each of the two erotic programs appears to presuppose a distinctive relationship between humanity and the gods. The soul in the palinode begins its journey already a follower of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{136} Plato, \textit{Symposium}, 212a (emphasis mine).
\item \textsuperscript{137} Although Plato does not use the terms “Idea” [\textit{idea}] or “Form” [\textit{eidos}] to describe these entities in the \textit{Phaedrus} and the \textit{Symposium}, the way in which he characterizes these entities is compatible with the accounts given of the Forms elsewhere in the dialogues. That said, it remains questionable just what these entities \textit{are}; since we are here concerned more with their function \textit{vis-à-vis} the erotic regime than with their ontological status, we will leave this question for another occasion.
\item \textsuperscript{138} A human being “must acquire understanding of what is said through principles drawn together by reasoning into a unity out of the multiplicity of perceptions. This is a recollection of what our soul saw,” prior to its earthly incarnation (Plato, \textit{Phaedrus}, 249b-c).
\item \textsuperscript{139} Plato, \textit{Symposium}, 211b.
\item \textsuperscript{140} That is, according to a rather literal reading of the palinode; in the next chapter I will advance a different interpretation.
\end{itemize}
one of the Olympian gods, and this affinity survives the soul’s fall into embodiment, exerting a formative influence upon the erotic tastes and behaviors of the individual. The distinction between the divine and the human does not map on to that between mortal and immortal (since human souls are themselves said to be immortal), but rather stems from a difference in the relationship between the parts of the soul, while the distinction between the human and the animal depends, as we have seen, upon the quality of the soul’s prehistoric experiences. Compare this with Diotima’s speech, in which Aphrodite alone of the Olympians puts in an appearance, and Eros himself is demoted from god to daimon—which is especially striking in light of the prominence of both the Olympian and the Uranian gods in the earlier speeches. In the Phaedrus we witness the flight of the great gods across the heavens; in Diotima’s lessons, the closest we get is a peek at the one-night stand of two non-canonical minor deities. But if the gods seem more distant, our animal cousins are closer than ever. Diotima introduces the discussion of reproduction with a description of animal eroticism, from which the human variety seems to differ only in that psychic pregnancy is an option for us—the underlying imperative (to achieve immortality through generation) is the same.

The upshot of all of which is that, as I suggested above, these different metaphysical parameters seem to affect the details of the erotic programs proposed. Whereas the lover’s royal road in the palinode proceeds spontaneously from the first serendipitous encounter with the beloved, the disciple of Diotima’s method must methodically cultivate an ever broader appreciation of the beautiful in all of its manifestations. But the palinode describes a world in which, at least ostensibly, the continuing existence of the soul is assured, some experience of

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141 Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 252c-253c for the specifics of this phenomenon.
142 She is mentioned by name in the story of Eros’ conception, since it happened at the feast celebrating her birth. Apart from three of Socrates’ typical exclamations (“By Zeus!”), the king of the gods is mentioned only once, in his capacity of garden-owner.
transcendent metaphysical principles has already taken place, and human beings can spend their earthly and heavenly existence as devotees of Zeus himself, if they so choose. Diotima, on the contrary, offers a vision of mortal beings who must labor incessantly in self-production, even on the cellular level, in order to keep from passing away altogether; of aloof gods who are known to us only through daimonic intermediaries;\textsuperscript{143} and of a single transcendent principle, the beautiful, of which we might catch a glimpse, depending upon our devotion and capacity. In short, if the lover in the \textit{Symposium} seems to be working harder at his erotic activities, it’s most probably because he is given so much less to work with. Conversely, the relative autonomy granted to \textit{eros} in the \textit{Phaedrus}, and the exemption of the loving couple from the economy of production, are perhaps possible only when the lover can count upon the persistence of his soul, his recollection of the beings beyond the heaven, and his close alliance with the gods. (Or, perhaps, when the lover has come to understand each of these things in rather different terms, as I shall suggest next chapter.)

A final word on the nature of these two interventions in the ancient Athenian erotic assemblage: though both programs take conventional pederasty as their point of departure, each does so in the face of distinct challenges, in service to divergent purposes, and resulting in noticeably different effects. This difference can be most basically stated in terms of the \textit{event} embodied by the assemblage in each case. As we have seen earlier, this event is what gives consistency to the heterogeneous components and processes making up the assemblage. What is the event embodied in the ancient Athenian pederastic assemblage? Although other answers are possible, we’ll say that it’s the \textit{production of citizens}. If successful, each of the two erotic programs proposed by Socrates and his alter-egos would effectively substitute a new and

\textsuperscript{143} “A god does not mingle with a human being; but through [daimonic power] occurs the whole intercourse and conversation of gods with human beings while they are awake and asleep” (Plato, \textit{Symposium}, 203a).
different event for the existing one. As modified by the program in the palinode, the assemblage would express the event of *becoming-winged*; modified by Diotima’s initiatory rites, on the other hand, it would express the *production(s) of the philosopher* (in both possible senses of the genitive: the process that “makes” a person into a philosopher, as well as the productive actions undertaken by the latter). Or, from still another vantage point, the difference between regimes could be expressed as a difference in perspective: whereas the program of the *Symposium* looks to the “molar” products of *eros* (that is, identifiable individuals, citizens, speeches, and deeds), the *Phaedrus* focuses upon the molecular growth of wings upon the lovers’ souls.\(^{144}\)

The relationship between each program and the existing assemblage differs in other respects as well. Socrates’ main challenge in the palinode is to defend pederastic *eros* against the attacks of the first two speeches, which resulted in the development of a strategy (namely, abstinence) to avoid damage to the beloved, as well as emphasis on the way in which divinely inspired *eros* necessarily entailed cultivation of the boy’s character. As in the *Symposium*, he aims at establishing an alliance between *eros* and philosophy, but in the case of the *Phaedrus* the alliance turns out to be asymmetrical. The price of the lover’s rehabilitation is his becoming-philosopher: philosophy is *necessary* to pederastic *eros*. But Socrates nowhere states that pederastic *eros* is the *only* path open to philosophy. The beings beyond the heavens hold sway over the tides of our desire, and their recollection provokes the growth of our wings, but beauty is not the only possible reminder; it’s just an exceptionally powerful one. Socrates has thus shown that philosophy holds the best solution to his society’s thorniest erotic problem, without sacrificing the autonomy of philosophy itself. With respect to the effects of this program upon the ancient Athenian assemblage, Socrates has invented a new persona (the amorous philosopher, 

\(^{144}\) Had we more space, we could say a great deal about the many molecular becomings evident in the *Phaedrus*: there is a becoming-winged, a becoming-philosopher, but also a becoming-god, becoming-horse, becoming-insect…
or the philosophical lover) and a new relation—the chastely passionate becoming-equal of lover and beloved—while showing that this relation is founded upon another, that which links earthly life and the incarnated soul to the beings beyond the heavens. This amounts to saying that the important form of social production enacted in the pederastic relationship cannot take place without a production escaping the economies of both oikos and polis, that is, the immanent, silent, and mysterious production of intensities within the soul that is the growth of wings and the lover’s madness.

The Symposium’s program also forges an erotic-philosophical alliance, but with somewhat different benefits from those of the Phaedrus. Eros receives from philosophy both recognition of its pervasive presence upon every level of the social assemblage, and an intelligible account of the relation between its various manifestations. As we saw above, it also wins a more ringing endorsement than is necessarily warranted. As for the philosophical side of things, both philosophy and the philosopher profit from their inclusion within a general narrative of productivity, where a “philosophical” productivity joins and even outranks the biological and political forms already well established within the assemblage. In addition, the relatively high status accorded to conventional pederasty in Socrates’ program opens the door to a mutual sympathy between the philosopher and the boy-lover—not an inconsiderable advantage, given both the suspicion and hostility with which philosophy was often regarded (a suspicion in fact equivalent to that under which pederasty suffered—both philosophy and pederasty were deemed potentially corrupting influences upon the young) and the fact that Socrates seems particularly

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145 We should keep in mind Socrates’ claim, at 150c in the Theaetetus, that he himself is “sterile of wisdom” and can therefore only act as a midwife to others. If we take this claim seriously when reading Diotima’s speech, at least two possibilities arise: perhaps philosophical eros has less productive power than we’d like to think; or perhaps Socrates himself is unerotic, and whatever route leads him to philosophy, it’s not the program he describes in the Symposium. For an argument for and analysis of Socrates’ erotic deficiency, cf. Rosen, Plato’s Symposium, p.223ff.
interested in winning over Agathon to philosophical pursuits.\(^{146}\)

The Socratic-Diotimic program seems therefore to propose continuity rather than disjunction between philosophy and the *polis*, particularly in their respective modes of production. To this extent, it represents a more conservative intervention in the existing erotic assemblage than that performed in the *Phaedrus*, a state of affairs possibly related to the more pessimistic view of the cosmos that prevails in Diotima’s speech.\(^{147}\) Its object is also importantly different. Where the palinode instructed us in how to be good pederasts, warning us that it would be necessary to become philosophers in the process, Diotima’s speech sketches a program of philosophical initiation, which just happens to involve an extended pederastic phase. And while philosophical *eros* demands subjection to *mania*, erotic philosophy seems to ask that we temper our mad passion for the singular beauty of an individual. From the point of view of the palinode, this sounds like a manipulation of *eros* (or worse, a convenient excuse to abandon the beloved when passion begins to flag).

This difference between the two programs gives rise to the question of whether *eros* and philosophy are really the compatible bedfellows Socrates would have us believe.\(^{148}\) And if it’s possible to distinguish a distinctively “Platonic” philosophical assemblage (including not just Plato’s writings, but the linguistic and material effects and relations surrounding these writings throughout the ages) from the more general Athenian socio-erotic assemblage, then we could argue that the Socratic erotic interventions function in the former assemblage to put into question the very alliance they try to establish in the latter.

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\(^{146}\) If it’s true, as Nietzsche suggested, that philosophers have often had to disguise themselves as something else in order to avoid persecution, Socrates seems happy here to blend in with the pederasts.

\(^{147}\) It’s also very likely a defensive posture adopted by Socrates in the face of his audience’s hostility towards philosophy; as we saw above, each of the preceding speakers is the student of a Sophist, except for Aristophanes (who had his own suspicions about the worth of philosophical pursuits). Cf. Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, pp.24-25 for the argument that viewed from Socrates’ perspective, Agathon’s banquet is the enemy camp.

\(^{148}\) This is without even getting into Alcibiades’ testimony (which we’ll discuss in detail at the end of the next chapter).
V. Conclusion: Still Looking for Love

The foregoing analysis of the *Phaedrus* and the *Syposium* in terms of deterritorializing interventions in an assemblage forced us to leave out a great deal.\(^{149}\) We’ll be taking up many of these dropped threads once more in the following chapter, but before we do that there is one last general question to address.

Where was love in all of this? – In an effort to keep from unwittingly adding or subtracting elements from the concept and phenomenon of *eros*, I have let the word remain untranslated. I have even avoided giving a definition of *eros*, hoping that what it is (the harder question) would become clearer once we determined how it functions. As this point it’s probably clear that both the word *eros* and, perhaps, the event it names blur the boundaries between two phenomena we’ve been attempting to analyze separately, namely, love (in something like Schelling’s sense: an emergent event of creation and passage) and desire (in something like Deleuze-Guattari’s sense: the intensive circulation of desire).

Our discussion of love in the previous chapter took place in the context of individuating systems: systems in which a constitutive problem composed of intensive differences (the flux of desire) finds its solution(s) in a series of individuations, the passage-to-actualization of which is love. Now, the pederastic relationship—or any relationship, for that matter—is itself one such system. Viewed from this perspective, both of the Socratic-Platonic programs analyzed above are attempts to sustain and assemble desire in such a way as to maximize the systemic potential for individuation, \(\text{and}\) to ensure that individuation unfolds, for the most part, along certain lines deemed in advance to be desirable for a given purpose. As a matter of fact, pederasty involves

\(^{149}\) Including (but not restricted to) the roles of lover and beloved, the tripartite nature of the soul, becoming-winged, rhetoric, and the speech of Alcibiades.
two separate systems, by turns competitive and complementary. As a *political* system, it aims to produce excellent citizens; as a *philosophical* system, it aims to produce philosophers and philosophical *logoi*. When fully successful, moreover, the individuating process maintains the individual in a relationship of ongoing friendliness (*philia*) with the system as a whole—so that the citizen is a friend to the *polis*, and the philosopher a friend to the metaphysical entities or principles that have guided his development. All of this is, of course, complicated by the host of conceptual and literary individuations proper to a Platonic *dialogical* system.

It might seem strange that we have left the theme of erotic individuation mostly undeveloped in this chapter. We did so because it was necessary for us to begin with the analysis of conventional pederasty and the deterritorializations it undergoes in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, in order to gain a sufficiently concrete understanding of the potential, the dangers, and the utter ambiguity of *eros*—a map of the territory, as it were. Having laid this groundwork we can now venture further afield, within Plato and beyond, hunting for the daimon of the threshold.
CHAPTER THREE: INDIVIDUATING EROS

I. Transition

We have not yet managed to pinpoint the function of love (according to our understanding of it) in either conventional pederastic eros or its Socratic variations described in the Phaedrus and the Symposium. Nevertheless, we have gained an understanding of the dynamics of conventional and Socratic pederasty, and have seen that this highly deterritorialized relationship expresses an important problem of social and political production. This degree of deterritorialization in turn allows Socrates to find a new, philosophical function for eros, a function which, with its tendency to devalue and discourage physical consummation, simultaneously offers a new solution to the problem of pederasty and makes philosophical practice integral to that solution. As we saw, he tied eros to a different mode of production in each dialogue, focusing upon philosophical production (itself conceived upon the model of biological reproduction) in the Symposium, and the immanent production of intensive desire—the becoming-winged of the soul—in the Phaedrus.

Our task now is, first, to redescribe the pederastic relationship as an individuating system, and second, to investigate the way in which individuation actually comes to pass. The former task requires that we take a closer look at the roles of lover and beloved; it’s obvious that individuation is a major issue for the beloved (how do we make a citizen—or a philosopher—out of this boy?), but less apparent how this might be a concern for the lover as well. And since Socrates’ interventions dramatically shift the emphasis onto the lover’s individuation, we will need to examine how and why this shift occurs. We will then need to show how the concept of
virtuality so crucial for our understanding of individuation applies in the case of *eros*. We’ll conclude by evaluating the distinctive dangers of erotic experience as an individuating process—taking Alcibiades as our star witness and paradigm case—and try to determine whether and to what extent *eros* functions in a way analogous to the “ontological love” discussed in the first chapter.

**II. Lover, Beloved and the Language of Eros**

Perhaps the single most striking feature of the *erastes-eromenos* relationship consists in the asymmetry that defines it. The conventional lover can hope for his beloved’s acquiescence and even his affection, but any expectation of the beloved’s reciprocal *desire* is doomed to disappointment; indeed, viewed from a certain (conventional) perspective, a lover’s desire to be desired would appear not only futile but unethical, since it would amount to desiring the boy’s corruption. For the pederastic relationship to fulfill its accepted function, the erotic desires of lover and beloved must remain at odds, never to converge. Or, more precisely, erotic desire as such is the prerogative of the lover’s position.

As we argued in the last chapter, this erotic asymmetry simultaneously enables and complicates the transaction between lover and beloved. The beloved, who derives no immanent benefit from his sexual encounters with the lover, is exchanging his acquiescence to these encounters for other goods that differ utterly in kind. And just as the boy uses his lover’s *eros* in order to gain entrance to full participation in the life of the *polis*, the *polis* capitalizes upon pederastic *eros* in order to obtain for itself new citizens. *Eros* thus finds itself taken up in a smaller-scale mechanism of personal exchange and a larger-level mechanism of civic production. These mechanisms seem uniquely apt to malfunction, however: sometimes the lover reneges on
his promises, and sometimes pederastic culture produces citizens of a type far removed from the ideal. Vagabond eros appears to be exceptionally resistant to these forms of capture, and exceptionally open to deterritorializations and decodings of every kind.

Or at least this is the case for conventional pederasty. How do things stand with the Platonic-Socratic variations upon this regime? We have already witnessed Socrates’ attempts to rehabilitate the lover’s persona, but have barely touched upon his treatment of the beloved. As a matter of fact, and in contrast to their positive evaluations of the lover (at least, the philosophical lover), both the Phaedrus and the Symposium offer indirect critiques of the beloved’s position. To remain within the boundaries traditionally prescribed for the beloved is to miss out on the most important benefits of eros; in order to attain these goods, the young man must himself come to occupy the standpoint of the lover.

Who speaks?

The lover’s advantage is especially manifest with respect to language. If desire is the prerogative of the lover, so too, for the most part, are speaking and writing. Conversely, the very act of speaking could place the speaker in the position of lover with regard to his audience. As Wohl points out, classical Greek rhetorical theory tended to view the relationship between speaker and listener along lines akin to those of conventional pederasty, with similar fears about the elements of passivity and enjoyment involved. The speaker is a lover who persuades or even compels his beloved, the audience, by playing upon its desires. Like the beloved who succumbs too easily, or who too obviously enjoys sexual relations with the lover, the listener who is too easily persuaded, or who takes too much pleasure in his passive role of listener, risks being
painted as a *kinaidos*, or even as a whore. In short, when Phaedrus and Socrates open their ears to the speech of Lysias, they are not necessarily in less “danger” than the fictitious boy the nonlover is attempting to seduce.

As rhetorical showpieces composed on the theme of erotic persuasion, the speeches of the *Phaedrus* dramatize the relationships between lover, beloved, and *logos*; yet the dialogue also shows that these relationships are not as simple as they may seem. The complex distribution of speaking roles in the first part of the *Phaedrus* forces us to acknowledge the difficulty of even sorting out “who” the speaker (or the lover) is in any given case. Although only two characters appear in the flesh, there are at least six formally distinct speaking personae: Socrates and Phaedrus, but also Lysias, the nonlover, the concealed lover, and Stesichorus. Each speech tends to distribute its speakers and listeners into the positions of lover or beloved, but this distribution does not proceed without complications and ambiguities—sometimes a single speaker (or listener) will be positioned as both a lover and a beloved, simultaneously or in rapid succession.

As we begin to untangle this web of erotic relations, we first encounter Lysias playing the part of lover, albeit through a persona who professes not to love; his speech seduces Phaedrus, who in turn is situated as beloved. On the other hand, the speech stands in relation to Socrates and Phaedrus as a beloved to these two “lovers of *logoi*”—and before the end of the dialogue, it will submit passively to their analysis. As both lover and beloved to the speech, Phaedrus speaks,

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1 There is another side to this coin, since speakers with a reputation for striving to please their audience were subject to similar opprobrium; we see this most clearly in the case of Aristophanes’ portrayals of Cleon (cf. Wohl, *Love among the Ruins*, ch.2, for an extensive discussion of this issue).

2 Other “minor” or less distinct voices include the purported Homeric author of the couplet about Eros/Pteros, the author of the verse on Midas’ tombstone, and the lyric poets invoked by Socrates.

3 His efforts to commit the speech to memory could be seen as a form of collaboration or complicity with an act of psychic penetration in which Phaedrus would play the passive role, and which his concealment of the speech beneath his cloak seems already to enact. What’s more, like a heedless beloved, Phaedrus has failed adequately to assess the merits of this “lover” to which he has granted psychic access.

4 Socrates describes himself at 228c as “someone who is obsessive about listening to speeches”, and as a lover of speeches [*tou ton logon erastou*].
but only in order to allow the speech to speak through him (Socrates spurns his offer of a paraphrase)⁵ and thereby temporarily assimilate his voice to those of Lysias and his (non)lover; nor can he bring himself to initiate the speech’s performance, but must allow himself to be coaxed by Socrates, much like a beloved succumbing to his lover's solicitations.⁶

To the extent that Socrates manages to resist the seduction of Lysias’ speech, he also rejects being cast by it in the role of beloved. Uncharacteristically, he then produces two speeches of his own (though of course there is ambiguity as to what extent they truly are his own). His reluctance to deliver the concealed lover's speech—a reluctance that mirrors Phaedrus' original coyness, as the speakers themselves acknowledge—already shows his deep ambivalence about the words he will say, and so we are not surprised when at several points he disavows authorship, attributing it in turn to “the beautiful Sappho or the wise Anacreon or even from some prose writer,”⁷ to the Muses,⁸ to the Nymphs that possess him (and by extension to the landscape),⁹ and even to Phaedrus himself.¹⁰ Curiously enough, however, the delivery of the palinode—despite its very different content and Socrates’ own apparent satisfaction with it—follows a similar pattern. Like the preceding speech the palinode also requires initiation from another voice (in this case his “daimonic sign”),¹¹ and is attributed to a different individual

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⁵ Plato, Phaedrus, 228d-e.
⁶ One could certainly argue that Phaedrus does initiate things, albeit in a roundabout way, since it is he who brings up the topic of Lysias' speech (227c); he plays coy, setting up the situation and then tactically retreating until adequately coaxed. But this seems like precisely the sort of tactics proper to the submissive or passive position in an asymmetrical relationship, since it produces its effect while retaining the form of passivity.
⁷ Plato, Phaedrus, 235c.
⁸ “Lead on then, clear-voiced Muses…Take hold with me of the tale this excellent fellow here forces me to tell…” (237a).
⁹ “This place really does seem divine; so if, as I present my speech, I often seem to be possessed by the Nymphs, don’t be surprised” (238c-d).
¹⁰ “[The] previous speech was by Phaedrus, the son of Pythocles, a man of Myrrinous…” (243e-244a).
¹¹ Plato, Phaedrus, 242b-c.
(“Stesichorus, the son of Euphemus, of Himera”). Like Phaedrus, then, Socrates presents himself as a quasi-passive conduit for the words of others. This is of course a common Socratic gambit, and one we saw deployed in his *Symposium* speech; it is, moreover, not entirely inappropriate, if we are to believe the claim of the *Symposium* that Socrates is more truly a beloved than a lover. Phaedrus, meanwhile, explicitly accepts the position of beloved in relation to Socrates' speeches, as both the audience being wooed and the fictive boy to whom the personae in the speeches address their arguments.

Three erotic speeches take place; not a single one allows the beloved boy to get a word in edgewise. Such is the nature of speeches, however: they are not dialogues (even when they contain dialogues), and their audience plays the part of listener rather than co-speaker. When Socrates interrupts the concealed lover’s speech midway through to ask Phaedrus what he thinks, he is speaking as Socrates, not the concealed lover, and asking Phaedrus the fellow lover of speeches, not Phaedrus the fictional beloved. (Nor does he let Phaedrus say much; as soon as Phaedrus has confirmed the “unusual fluency” of Socrates’ discourse, the next words out of Socrates’ mouth are “Then hear me in silence.”) No one seems interested in hearing what arguments the beloved might have to offer in response to the lover’s blandishments.

What would the speech of a beloved sound like, anyway? The *Symposium* gives us two such speeches: that of Phaedrus, speaking in his own voice this time, and that of Agathon. We’ve already discussed at length the limitations of these two speeches. Most relevant here is the fact that for all his insistence upon the need for praise of Eros, Phaedrus has very little to say.

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12 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244a.
13 Prior to commencing the palinode, Socrates asks, “Where’s that boy of mine I was talking to?” Phaedrus replies “He’s always here, right beside you, whenever you want him” (243e).
14 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 238c-d.
15 We do not include here the speech of Alcibiades, since he explicitly claims for himself the status of lover in his relationship to Socrates.
about the experience of *eros*, praising instead the benefits conferred upon a beloved by a lover’s attentions and by the gods—benefits, in short, that are entirely extrinsic to *eros* itself, and could arguably be obtained just as easily and perhaps more safely and effectively by other means. As for Agathon (who in his narcissism represents an identity of lover and beloved), his desire to valorize his own status of beloved causes him to mistake fundamentally the nature of Eros.

Neither Phaedrus nor Agathon seems to quite get what *eros* is all about, which suggests that the constitutive injunction against the beloved’s experience or expression of erotic desire sharply restricts his perspective upon the situation.\(^{16}\)

On the other hand, it would oversimplify matters to claim that Plato territorializes the speaking role entirely upon the lover’s position. For one thing, there is a certain silence that affects several lovers at several points in the dialogues—namely, the muting of one’s “own” logos\(^{17}\) required for the transmission of another’s logos through oneself. Socrates “disowns” his speeches in the *Phaedrus* and performs a similar trick in the Symposium when he lets the woman Diotima speak her doctrine through him (although the latter's discourse is entwined with that of Socrates’ younger self).\(^{18}\) It is, I think, because he is a lover of speeches that Phaedrus transmits Lysias’ words. Nor must we forget Aristodemus, that lover of Socrates whose own speech—if he

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\(^{16}\) On the other hand, it bears repeating that the silence of the beloved communicated to us by the surviving evidence might be misleading, and that in any case the restrictions against what a beloved could “properly” say about his own erotic experiences do not guarantee that this experience was necessarily either non-existent or vacuous. In other words, we should leave open the possibility that at least some beloved(s) might have possessed a great deal more insight into *eros* than the speeches of the *Symposium* would have us believe. Yet the ultimate value of such unexpressed (because inexpressible) insight is questionable, at least from our perspective (for example, what reality could it have had in the ancient Athenian social assemblage, for which, as we’ve seen, the beloved’s experience of desire was above all something to be denied and foreclosed?). Seen from this perspective, the palinode’s attempt to express a beloved’s reciprocal desire is discursively very daring. We could also view Socrates’ insistence that the beloved’s desire is simply a “backflow” or “echo” of that of the lover as a compromise allowing the beloved’s desire to be spoken without raising the specter of the *kinaidos*.

\(^{17}\) To the extent that a logos can ever be one’s own.

made one—does not survive, but who is responsible for the transmission of the speeches of all the other symposiasts.\textsuperscript{19} It seems that the logoi of which these men are the lovers do not take the submissive position prescribed to human beloveds, but rather penetrate their lovers, filling them up to the point of displacing the lovers’ own words. At the same time, however—as Socrates observes of the written word—these domineering logoi also have a helpless, passive, inert aspect, parasitically dependent upon their loving “hosts” for their transmission.\textsuperscript{20} Like living individuals, speeches \textit{do} reproduce themselves, but through a kind of viral contagion; and sometimes the speech will achieve its own survival and propagation at the cost of whatever other spiritual offspring its host might have borne. If the first part of the \textit{Phaedrus} addresses the risk of damage to the beloved boy at the hands of his lovers, the second part tackles the still more insidious danger of damage to the lover of logoi—in the coils of his beloved speeches.

But the problem of \textit{who} speaks in the lover’s voice extends far beyond this special—and especially Platonic—case. As we argued last chapter, an erotic relationship consists in more than the expression of individual passion: it is the product of an entire social assemblage, which as a rule has always already assembled the desire circulating between lover and beloved into specific forms of content and expression.\textsuperscript{21} This holds as true for discourse as for any other component of the relationship. The “I love you” upon the lover’s lips is not his own invention, but originates within the assemblage; if it sometimes acts as a deterritorialized and deterritorializing emission, it just as frequently serves to reterritorialize and stratify the flows of desire. Caught up in the social assemblage of which we are simultaneously patients and agents, products and producers,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} There is also, arguably, the case of Plato himself.
\item \textsuperscript{20} According to Derrida, this is the substance of the “Platonic” critique of writing: it simultaneously has too much and too little power, either dominating the soul or lying around lifelessly.
\item \textsuperscript{21} This does not make the erotic relationship any less a matter of desire—quite the contrary. It simply reminds us that even the most intimate desire is impersonal. The assemblage itself is precisely an assemblage of \textit{desire}; Deleuze-Guattari describe it as “the faceless figure of the libido” (\textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, p.36/50).
\end{itemize}
“we reproduce its statements when we think we are speaking in our own name; or rather we speak in our own name when we produce its statements.” Every lover must therefore wonder, like Socrates, “whether [he] happen[s] to be a beast more complex and agitated than Typhon,” the hundred-headed monster who sought to overthrow Zeus; does not love make such a monster of him, driving him to speak with the din of many voices? In love we can’t help using worn currencies and the tongues of others, and fragments of direct and indirect quotation populate even the most singular erotic discourse, challenging the lover to set them in variation. (As we will soon argue, such variation is a central aspect of erotic individuation.) In which case the more-or-less intentional transmission of alien *logoi* to which the speakers in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* are especially prone follows as much from the nature of the *logoi* of love as it does from the love of *logoi*.

(I am not claiming here that this situation is unique to love and to lovers—on the contrary, it is the norm in every discursive situation. It might simply be the case that in love we feel this problem with a unique force. When and why would we wish for words as-yet-unheard, for a brand new lexicon, if not to offer to the singular people and situations with which our loves confront us?)

So there are no absolutes here: sometimes a beloved speaks, and sometimes a lover finds

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22 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.36. This is true not only of spoken and written language but of the language of gestures and practices as well. One of the characters in Margaret Atwood’s *The Edible Woman* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart-Bantam Limited, 1969) captures this phenomenon when he says, regarding his own inability to successfully consummate a romantic relationship, that his past love interests have all been “too literary. It’s because they haven’t read enough books” (p. 196). This comment reveals the link between ignorance of a body of discourse and the tendency to unwittingly reproduce it; it also highlights the peculiar problem of those who perhaps know a given discourse too intimately (the speaker, Duncan, is a graduate student in English) and for whom most of the available repertoire of discourse and gesture is therefore already “clichéd” or “inauthentic”.


24 To say nothing of the hubris associated with Socratic *eros*, which we shall discuss in greater detail toward the end of the chapter.

25 Barthes provides countless examples of this in *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, which crystallizes around more or less faithful borrowings from the Western tradition’s great texts on love.
himself silenced or co-opted by a discourse that is not his own. Nevertheless, with respect to a certain type of language—namely, that stemming from and expressive of erotic experience, at least in the ancient Athenian assemblage—the lover occupies a privileged position. Many factors contribute to this state of affairs, including the lover’s socially (and by extension linguistically) dominant position, and the conventional beloved’s supposed immunity to the effects of eros, not to mention the fact that the lyric poetry that provided the standard vocabulary for talking about eros takes the position of lover—not that of beloved—as its starting point. Beyond this, however, something specific to the relation between eros and language seems to compel speech in a way that ordinary experience does not: the lover’s desire for the beloved demands inscription upon or recognition by the social assemblage. The first “I-love-you” spoken in a relationship often tells neither party anything they did not already know, says nothing that the speaker has not said silently to herself a thousand times—but nevertheless qualitatively alters the nature of their relation.

Not only must the lover speak his desire, there is some obstinate thread of eros that does not care, and perhaps even finds it preferable, if the lover’s words drown out or foreclose the beloved’s reply. In fact, there are at least two types of amorous discourse—the exhortation and the encomium—that profit from the silence of their audience. Take the three speeches of Phaedrus as “persuasive” or exhortative and those of the Symposium as encomiums, or speeches of praise, I am therefore simply referring to what I take to be the dominant mode or tonality at work.

26 In this respect, the lover’s spoken discourse closely resembles the written text, and what Barthes has to say—in a written work about love—about the latter (writing) is, I think, more generally true of the former (erotic discourse). Like writing, the lover’s discourse can be a “steamroller” that “smothers the other, who, far from perceiving the gift in it, reads there instead an assertion of mastery.” On the other hand, since the beloved is himself the force compelling the lover’s words, it arguably “doesn’t matter”—to the lover, at any rate—“that [the beloved] feels continuously reduced to silence, that [his] own discourse seems...smothered beneath the monstrous discourse of the amorous subject” (cf. Roland Barthes, A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), pp. 78-79). It is not coincidental that the same dialogue—the Phaedrus—treats both of eros and of writing, as well as rhetoric.

27 This distinction between encomium and exhortation is not absolute. Many speeches of either type will feature elements of the other, since an encomium must persuade its audience of the worthiness of its subject, while exhortation often makes use of praise (of its audience or of its proposed end) in order to accomplish its goal. When I describe the speeches of the Phaedrus as “persuasive” or exhortative and those of the Symposium as encomiums, or speeches of praise, I am therefore simply referring to what I take to be the dominant mode or tonality at work.
the Phaedrus, which aim primarily to persuade the beloved to welcome the speaker’s advances. The array of arguments offered by the non-lover and the concealed lover rely heavily upon their rhetorical finesse and uninterrupted presentation; taken individually, each claim is highly questionable and would probably not withstand dialogical treatment. Even Socrates’ palinode requires that its audience accept a number of metaphysical assumptions that would seem far less convincing were they stripped of their mythical trappings and subjected to systematic interrogation. And the Symposium’s speeches in praise of Eros and eros benefit similarly from an absence of dialogical questioning—as evidenced by what happens to the arguments of Agathon’s pretty speech when confronted by Socrates.

In a similar vein, dialogue is a risky business when one’s object is to praise. The specific virtue of dialogue lies in its capacity to present multiple and often antagonistic perspectives, but what if the one to be praised turns out to be unworthy when seen from one or more of these perspectives? This danger threatens any object of praise, but especially an object as thoroughly ambiguous as eros. We shouldn’t be shocked, therefore, to discover that a few minutes of Socratic dialogue, first with Agathon and then with Diotima, reveal this ambiguity of eros that the earlier speeches did their best to keep under wraps. (By contrast, the later presentation of the “ladder of love”, which attributes a more positive value to eros, has a largely monological form.)

Finally, beyond its intended effect upon an audience, the praise of eros and Eros tends toward an articulation of affect, a pure voicing of desire, which passes into language in such a way as to be able to enjoy and affirm itself as such. The palinode reads like a persuasive speech in the midst of escaping its own vocation of persuasion, singing no longer to the beloved boy but to lovers everywhere: what could counterarguments do but disrupt the song? (Unless, of course, one’s desire has developed a taste for dialectic, the cultivation of which constitutes an important
goal of the Socratic erotic program, as we shall see. But in order to develop such a taste one must first be persuaded, and often, of necessity, by arguments that one will subsequently come to recognize as faulty.)

Persuasion and praise: their monological nature would not be so troublesome, were it not the case that much of the discourse addressed to the beloved by a conventional lover—at least in the wooing phase of the relationship—takes one of these forms. Through persuasion the lover establishes an erotic relation with the boy, and his subsequent praise—of the boy, and of eros in general—is one means whereby his desire rejoices in and affirms this relation, flowing out toward the boy in a stream of words. We still need, however, to articulate more completely the position of the beloved in this discursive situation. In addition to acting magnetically (and often silently) upon the lover to draw forth this flow of verbiage, what linguistic role does the beloved play in this relationship? Specifically, how can he respond to the lover’s words?

Semiotics and erotics

The flow of desire expressed in the lover’s words is also, from the beloved’s point of view, a flow of signs. As the one to whom such signs are addressed, therefore, the beloved must learn to interpret them: the beloved is first of all an interpreter. This labor of interpretation is a delicate and even dangerous enterprise upon which a great deal depends. Gathering up the seductive signs emitted by all his would-be lovers, the beloved must ask in each case: Is this lover sincere in his protestations of care and devotion? Do his signs express what they explicitly claim to express, or do they attempt to conceal the state of soul from which they originate? He claims to have the best intentions, but what if he does not know what is best for me, or is incapable of achieving it? And even if the signs do tell the truth about the state of the lover’s soul
today, how can I be certain that what they tell me will continue to hold true tomorrow?

The first two speeches of the *Phaedrus* address these interpretive problems while presenting what looks like an easier and safer alternative. To the boy’s question of whether and to what extent he can take his lover’s signs at face value, the concealed lover and non-lover reply: You can’t. The signs of *eros* are deceptive, not only because your best interests do not coincide with those of your lover, but because the madness of the lover prevents him from grasping the truth of his situation, which is that his passion is temporary and volatile. But there’s an easier way: gratify me, since I do not love and my signs are therefore trustworthy… Although it’s doubtful whether any actual lovers ever attempted so brazen a line, its appeal is undeniable, for it promises a shortcut around an otherwise daunting task of interpretation. And part of the point of the concealed lover’s speech is that it demonstrates (to Phaedrus and to us, at any rate) the illusory nature of this shortcut: the one who warns us not to trust madmen is secretly mad himself and therefore cannot be trusted. The boy is right back where he started.

As was the case with speech and silence, however, the interpretive labor characterizing the beloved’s position is not wholly restricted to that position—especially when it comes to Socrates’ programs. Indeed, already in conventional pederasty some interpretation devolved upon the lover. We’ve mentioned the issue of the beloved’s character; both Pausanias and Lysias’ non-lover recognized the problems posed by a character still in the process of individuation. How could the lover know whether a given boy had anything more to offer than his good looks, soon to fade? Would lasting friendship be possible, or would the lover come to regret having encumbered himself with (and having perhaps sacrificed his fortune and other long-term interests for) an undesirable acquaintance? Somehow, in the midst of his erotic *mania*, he must discern and interpret the hints of adult character glimpsed in youthful behavior, just as the beloved must
interpret the alluring *logoi* offered him by the lover. For both lover and beloved, the challenge consists in predicting the future behavior of an erotic system that their own choices—based upon their interpretations of currently available signs—will cause to evolve and change. Their positions differ chiefly as to their relative stakes, which were not as high for the lover, since unlike the beloved *he* did not risk ruining body, soul, and reputation through an unfortunate choice of partner.

But the erotic approach prescribed by Socrates-Stesichorus gives the lover new grist for the interpretive mill. In the first place, the palinode reveals to us a prehistoric, cosmic domain to which all the signs of *eros* must henceforth be referred. In this context, erotic attraction appears simultaneously more complex and less mysterious than it did in earlier accounts, while *eros* itself paradoxically becomes at once both freer and less contingent. For it is cosmic prehistory that accounts for our attraction to a particular individual in the first place. Though we have no clear recollection of such prehistoric existence, our desire recognizes and responds to certain signs that evoke it. We respond to visible beauty in general because it echoes our former vision of the Beautiful itself; but we select this *one* individual from out of the field of young beauties because something about his character—say, the Zeus-like “nature of a friend of wisdom and a leader”—hints at the god we once followed; a god whom we know, on the basis of this resemblance, that the beloved followed too. The lover will know his beloved when he sees him because they already share an affinity that passes through the god and their mutual devotion to him. Because the erotic sign-system has its foundation in metaphysical kinship and prior knowledge, the signs of character emitted by the beloved lose at least some of their ambiguity for the lover.

The palinode also introduces important modifications to the interpretation of a different set of signs, namely, the signs circulating within the lover’s soul. Various physiological and
affective phenomena attend the lover’s first encounter with his beloved: he feels “awe” and “dread,” while “goose bumps” and “an unusual warmth and sweating”\textsuperscript{28} physically communicate to him that something important is taking place. In the boy’s absence, these signs give way to a prickling pain within the soul, coupled with an intense pleasure that saturates the memories associated with the boy. Although \textit{we} know (because Socrates tells us) that these signs signal the beginning of the soul’s becoming-winged, the lover cannot immediately diagnose his own condition (as evidenced by the soul’s perplexity over the mixture of pleasure and pain it feels).\textsuperscript{29} Nor can the lover immediately intuit what course of action these signs command, beyond the achievement of greater physical proximity to the boy who seems to be their cause.

The novelty of Socrates’ approach consists less in his description of the signs of erotic attraction than in his insistence that \textit{erotic attraction itself} is a sign—and an ambiguous one, at that. Already \textit{formally} complex, with its dissonant components of pleasure and pain, the sign of attraction gestures in two directions at once. As a set of effects upon body and soul, it points beyond itself to some individual or object that would be the \textit{cause} of these effects; as an imperative uncomfortably gripping the lover, it gestures toward some course of action that would alleviate the discomfort. In each case, however, the sign indicates multiple possible referents, making misreading a strong possibility. What causes attraction? It seems to be the boy, but the boy himself is just a sign of the god we once followed and the “beings beyond the heavens” we strained to see. What action does our attraction require? Is it to consummate and thereby put an end to our desire? No, because the only action that counts is the soul’s becoming-winged, of which our present discomfort is the sign. To go wrong, like the one long-exiled from the heavens

\textsuperscript{28} Plato, \textit{Phaedrus}, 251a-b.
\textsuperscript{29} Plato, \textit{Phaedrus} 251d-e.
who immediately “abandons himself to pleasure…in the manner of a four-footed beast,” 30 is not just to risk damaging the beloved, but also to abort the becoming-winged of the soul before it has a chance to properly begin.

The lover’s hermeneutic challenges are compounded by the presence of three simultaneous and dissenting interpretive processes at work in his soul. Socrates names them the good horse, the unruly horse, and the charioteer: each receives the signs emitted by the boy, but two of them—the charioteer and the unruly horse—disagree as to the appropriate course of action, and it is their violent confrontation that the lover experiences as a confusing mixture of pleasure and pain, fear and desire. (Incidentally, this adds a third dimension to the signs of eros: not simply effects of a cause and exhortations to action, these signs are symptomatic of the soul’s multiple and contentious condition.) It takes some time before the charioteer’s interpretation prevails, but this is actually a fortunate thing, since it is the unruly horse’s temporary ascendency that compels the lover to approach the boy and initiates a relationship. The boy bears the signs of the god; the lover’s bittersweet desire signals the growth of wings; and the course of action commanded by these signs is neither to consummate nor wholly to repress desire, but to sustain it. Such would seem to be the correct interpretation of the signs of love in the palinode; but only a sufficiently vivid apprehension of the world of prehistoric experiences will permit the lover to reach these conclusions.

The palinode thus imposes upon the lover a substantial interpretive burden. In contrast, it has very little to say about the beloved’s efforts to decipher his suitor’s true intentions: we hear only that “as time goes along, destiny and increasing maturity lead him to accept his lover into

30 Plato, Phaedrus, 250e-251a.
his company.”  

What eventually compels the beloved to interpret is not in fact any persuasive sign emitted by his lover but rather the confusing signs indicating his own becoming-lover.

First, a word about the process responsible for this transformation. The lover’s wing-feathers sprout in response to the flow of his desire, but he experiences this desire not as an autochthonous element or product of his psyche, but rather as an intrusive force flooding into him: in fact, the flow of desire is identical with the flow of beauty (itself a sign or set of signs) emanating from the beloved. With continued contact between lover and beloved, some of this flow eventually escapes absorption or containment within the lover, rebounding back upon its source. Strangely enough, however, the beloved does not recognize these signs as his own, subtly altered as they are by their contact with the lover. Thus when they awaken his own desire and initiate his becoming-winged, he “neither knows what has happened to him nor can he explain it”.  

This situation confirms what the Symposium led us to suspect last chapter, which is that the lover seeks not just beauty, but the encounter with beauty in some way external or foreign to him—like the breath of an unknown world; although the beloved already “has” this beauty, he requires the lover’s mediation if it is to profit him by provoking his desire and producing wings.

(The response of the beloved appears somewhat strange to modern eyes, and troubling to any perspective from which full reciprocity would seem like the highest erotic value. For in this account, the beloved's eros is only the “image” [eidolon] of that of the lover, and the beloved's desire to be with the lover is said to be “less strong” than the latter's desire for him. However loving the beloved's response, however keen his desire, it remains an “echo” or

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31 Plato, Phaedrus, 255a.
32 Plato, Phaedrus, 255d.
33 Proust—whose work abounds in borrowings from and critiques of Plato's erotic theories—offers a brusque rejoinder to the Phaedrus' "backflow theory": as the narrator ruefully reflects, “it is the misfortune of the smitten lover to be unable to recognize that although he sees before him a beautiful face, his mistress sees his face, which the pleasure born of the sight of beauty has not beautified, but rather deformed” (Marcel Proust, A la recherche du temps perdu, p.1759, translation mine).
“backflow” of the lover's affect. On the one hand, this reads like a necessary compromise of Socratic novelty with the standard tenets of pederastic virtue: the beloved desires—but not too much. On the other hand, if the experience of eros itself is what is important, we can't help but wonder if the beloved is getting the short end of the stick again. Would he not do better to wait until he can take his own turn as lover, and get the lion's share of desire?

At any rate, by the time we enter the beloved’s perspective, he has begun to receive this flow of beauty-eros and respond to it—which means that he has ceased simply to be a beloved, except in the most technical sense. The beloved-becoming-lover now faces a task similar to that of his partner, but with some important differences. The aesthetic and behavioral conventions of the pederastic assemblage made it easy for the lover to (mis)recognize the boy as the cause of his desire, and to interpret that desire itself as a desire for physical intercourse; to come instead to the conclusions described by Socrates required a real interpretive leap. In contrast, the interpretive criteria proper to the boy's position in the assemblage make it difficult for him even to recognize the lover as an object of his desire—much less to comprehend that his feelings are erotic rather than simply friendly. Although he thereby tends to misread the signs, such a misreading—unlike that initially risked by the lover—has a salutary effect upon the relationship, since it staves off the moment of temptation.

When this moment does arrive, it brings a resurgence of the interpretive struggle within each of the lovers’ souls, as their respective unruly horses strive once again to make their voices heard. Socrates describes this “moment of truth” in such a way as to suggest equal responsibility on the part of lover and beloved, since each must resist the interpretation imposed by his unruly

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34 The force of this objection depends upon whether the lifelong relationship between lover and beloved is meant to preclude either party forming passionate erotic attachments outside of this relationship. The modern tendency to prize lifelong monogamous coupling as the highest form of erotic relationship may tempt us to read into the pederastic practice described in the Phaedrus an exclusivity that is not necessarily there.

35 The beloved “supposes [his response] to be friendship rather than love and calls it that” (Plato, Phaedrus, 255e).
horse upon the situation. Yet it has also been the lover’s responsibility to give the boy the sort of education that would enable him to resist erotic temptation; and in a pinch, it seems unlikely that the lover’s decision would not prevail. In short, the success of the love affair seems to hinge far more upon the lover’s initial interpretive success (or lack thereof) than upon the beloved’s subsequent interpretations.

We can conclude, therefore, that the palinode proposes a significant redistribution of interpretive responsibility. Whereas conventional pederasty required the beloved to decipher the persuasive signs of his prospective lovers, the program of the palinode demands far more of the lover’s ability to read the signs not only of his beloved’s character, but of the nature of his own desire. The beloved’s labors truly begin only when he himself becomes a lover, and even then his situation remains easier than that of his lover, since the beloved-becoming-lover’s context renders unlikely the most potentially disastrous misreadings.36

This redistribution of responsibility corresponds to a shift in focus away from the beloved’s individuation and toward that of the lover.37 For a long time, the problem of the boy’s development tended both to justify and to put into question the value of pederastic practice. Although Socrates assures us (in the Phaedrus, at least) that his program will foster the beloved’s individuation along desirable lines, he seems interested less in that process than in the transformation eros brings to the lover. Both the Phaedrus and Symposium explore a question that had previously only ever been asked in lyric poetry: what does the lover’s individuation produce? And furthermore, how does this line of individuation relate to, connect with, or diverge

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36 The case of Alcibiades would seem to be an exception, but I would argue that it is the exception that proves the rule, since it would seem precisely to have been Alcibiades’ abnormal relationship with his “context” that enabled him to draw the conclusions he drew concerning his relationship with Socrates.

37 Although we’ve focused primarily upon the Phaedrus, the same conclusions clearly seem to hold true of Socrates-Diotima’s program in the Symposium, which begins by refuting the primacy of the beloved boy and subsequently follows the trajectory of the lover alone.
from other developmental lines—in particular, the line whereby an individual becomes a philosopher? We must now address these questions.

III. Erotic Individuation

Virtuality and erotic individuation

Before analyzing the details of erotic individuation, we should review the relevant points that emerged from our discussion of individuation in the first chapter. Individuation (that is, the production of individuals from out of preindividual singularities) takes place in the context of a system—a metastable system, to be exact. Following Simondon, we defined such a system by its inclusion of a “disparation”, that is, of two different and as-yet uncommunicating dimensions. This disparation, as we saw, poses a problem to which individuation is the solution.

Invoking Deleuze’s concept of virtuality enabled us to explain the ontological status of this systemic problem, as well as the mechanism productive of its solution(s). Replacing the more traditional term “possibility”, “virtuality” includes everything that is real without being actual, especially all the options for becoming that a system’s given material-energetic state entails. We have seen that actuality and virtuality are ontologically inseparable: actualization is always actualization of the virtual, but virtuality exists only through its inherence within concrete actuality. It’s important, however, to remember that the actualization of the virtual does not proceed through resemblance: neither virtuality itself nor the processes whereby it is actualized resemble the product of that actualization. The determinate individuals and stable identities that appear in actuality are not produced by some pre-existing spectral “double” that required only an infusion of reality to become actual; rather, actual entities and phenomena arise from—and

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38 It is this feature, as you will recall, that differentiates the concept of the virtual from that of the possible, which latter does tend to presume some resemblance between a possibility and the real existence it may or may not assume.
continue to envelop—distinctive virtual distributions of intensive differences. For virtuality always functions by way of intensities: not only is virtual existence itself composed of intensive differentiations, but the actualization of the virtual tends to take place through the interactions of intensive, material-energetic differences—and specifically, the systemic disparities in which metastability consists.

The pederastic relationship—or any erotic relationship, for that matter—is an intensively differentiated metastable system of the sort that interests us. Or would it be more accurate to refer here to systems in the plural? In fact, there are always several distinct but related systems involved in erotic individuation. We discovered last chapter that many elements of a given assemblage not only participate in other assemblages, but also compose assemblages in their own right; the same can be said of individuating systems. Within the collection of bodies, practices, and discourse called “classical pederasty”, lover and beloved together form a system, but each is himself a system containing further sub-systems, each of which may also form systems with other components outside of the individual. Moving in the opposite direction, we find that the pederastic couple itself constitutes an element both in the Athenian social-political system and in the vaster cosmic system. Last but not least, the accounts of such relationships given in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* participate in various textual and philosophical systems. In other words, a single erotic relationship has the capacity to give rise to multiple and often very dissimilar processes of individuation operating on several different scales. Part of our task will involve mapping these processes and the various individuating systems they involve. (In the process, we will find that that any self-description emerging from the erotic relationship will tend to be partial and somewhat fragmentary, since it cannot possibly take into account all of the systemic interactions contiguous to, overlapping or intersecting with itself.)
So what kinds of individuation are at stake in erotic systems? We have argued that conventional pederastic systems harness the lover’s desire in order to produce new political units (citizens), or, more precisely, to intervene in and enhance the individuations of young men on the threshold of maturity. It is hoped and believed that the boy who grows to manhood in a well-constituted erotic relationship with a responsible and virtuous lover will undergo a psychic transformation from an amorphous bundle of drives and capacities into a temperate, courageous, just and wise adult. Under his lover’s guidance, his views and beliefs about the world will take on the precision, clarity, and conviction necessary to govern his actions. The pederastic liaison will initiate him into the forms of relationship proper to a fully-fledged adult citizen, as well as cultivating a more general relationship of ongoing friendliness (*philotes*) with his individuating milieu, which includes the entire social, natural, and cosmic assemblage.

If it works, this individuation will take place via the circulation and communication of intensities. The “asymmetry” we have already observed in the lover-beloved system manifests as an immense double disparition between the two parties. Most obviously, the beloved’s beauty incarnates a series of maximal intensities, of which the lover’s mature physique represents a significantly lesser (perhaps even minimal) degree (would the unlovely Socrates stand at degree 0, then?); between these disparates flows the stream of the beloved’s beauty that is also and simultaneously a flow of signs and the flow of the lover’s desire. Yet a second disparity also mobilizes the system, a disparity between degrees of *freedom*. In a purely social sense freedom lies mostly upon the lover’s side, since he fully possesses the rights of citizenship presumably still lacking to the beloved. Both erotically and ontologically, however, things look very different. In principle the beloved enjoys an erotic freedom that is precisely a freedom *from eros*; as yet he suffers from no erotic compulsion binding his desire to a specific individual. More
importantly, his relative lack of individuation leaves him *ontologically* free—or at any rate freer than his lover. Countless virtual worlds gather like clouds in his vicinity, implicating so many incompossible futures from which he is free to select (albeit unconsciously in many cases). How much of what we call the “beauty of youth” consists in just this: the property of containing vast expanses of the purely virtual? In that case the flow of beauty emanating from the beloved would not be entirely separable from a flow of freedom.

For better or worse, the beloved’s ontological freedom is temporally finite, doomed to be lost—not through any external coercion, but through the inexorable actualization of virtuality that attends maturation. For finite beings, *to be* anything at all unavoidably uses up or cancels out some quantity of one’s *freedom* to be, even as it has the potential to open up new options for being. The lover's function here is to guide and assist his beloved’s selection of some possible world or worlds. Through the circulation of signs—the beloved’s revelatory signs, the lover’s persuasive and pedagogical ones—what is only virtually contained in the beloved comes to actualization and in the process changes in kind, for it ceases to be virtual. In this respect the lover’s signs—along with the world(s) from which they emanate—act like seed-crystals upon the beloved’s preindividual field, precipitating new beliefs, habits and virtues (or vices). The entire process ceases only with the cessation of the flow of beauty and freedom from the beloved and the corresponding flow of desire from the lover—that is, the beloved’s erotic individuation ends, or hits an important plateau, when his physical and social maturity has fully used up or cancelled out the intensive differences that had played a role in shaping it.

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39 This is true of his erotic freedom as well. Sappho has Aphrodite console the lover of an indifferent beloved with the promise that “if she runs, she’ll soon be chasing; if she won’t take gifts, well, she’ll give them; and if she doesn’t love, soon she will love—/ even unwilling” (cited in Calame, *Poetics of Eros*, p.25). Calame notes that the goddess is not promising the lover that her desire will be reciprocated, but rather reminding her that her beloved is destined eventually to become a lover, and to suffer the same torments currently afflicting the speaker. In other words, the beloved’s erotic freedom is as fleeting as his or her youthful beauty.
In contrast to the singular transformations undergone by the beloved, the lover’s own individualization initially seems both limited and predictable. At the outset of the love affair he metamorphoses from an individual who does not love into one who loves; at the end, he undergoes the same process in reverse—or so the non-lover and the concealed lover would have us believe. Seen from this perspective, the lover’s passionate involvement with his beloved serves no more to individuate him than would a drinking binge or an attack of hay-fever, or any other cyclical affliction that comes and goes and leaves its sufferer much the same as he was—if perhaps a little the worse for wear.

Nevertheless, as the lyric poets recognized, the process of erotic individuation has the potential to transform the lover in more profound ways. Eros changes his body into an amorous body with new affective capacities, which is a significant and instructive individuation even when it is fleeting. Dormant senses awaken, electrified by the boy's presence. As Carson says, “There is something uniquely convincing about the perceptions that occur to you when you are in love. They seem truer than other perceptions, and more truly your own, won from reality at personal cost.”⁴⁰ Equipped with this new body, the lover begins to envision a new world, that singular world in which his courtship will have succeeded and the boy will have accepted his company. And even as he dreams a new world, he cannot look at the old without discovering hitherto-unknown resources for variation, for in suspending the force of social convention (as it was notorious for doing), eros reveals that reality has enough room for the lover to create a world compatible with his desires. The creation of this world constitutes, if only temporarily, the problem dominating the lover’s existence; to achieve this creation the lover is prepared to exercise all of his ingenuity, sometimes resorting to unprecedentedly noble (or base) behaviors.

⁴⁰ Carson, Eros the Bittersweet, p.36.
This is what we meant when we said, last chapter, that *eros* deterritorializes the lover: it jolts him slightly out of synch with the world of actuality by presenting the virtuality immanent to it—and by presenting these virtual worlds as desirable.

The only problem, as we have seen, is that not all individuations are positive, and the criteria for evaluating a given transformation are themselves uncertain. Both the incursion of *eros* and the feverishly sensitized body to which it gives rise can be alarming, especially to people who privilege self-possession and moderation. In the *Republic*, Socrates and Glaucon concur as to the “madness”—and hence, the civic undesirability—of erotic desires and pleasures: the amorous body is not the ideal citizen body. And we have already discussed at length the ways in which the beloved’s individuation could go wrong, as a rule because the lover selfishly and tyrannically selects only those worlds of the beloved in which his submission to the lover is complete. It’s also true that the possible worlds glimpsed—and perhaps even actualized—by the lover in the grip of passion often prove to be of questionable value when weighed by sober judgment—hence the non-lover’s warning that fully “recovered” lovers tend to regret their earlier manic largesse. *Eros* individuates, but individuation easily runs amok. Which is where Socrates’ unique brand of erotics comes in.

The Platonic-Socratic programs introduce into the erotic system new parameters which aim to sustain and assemble desire so as to maximize the systemic potential for individuation, while ensuring that individuation unfolds along optimal lines. Socrates-Stesichorus and Socrates-Diotima describe several distinct types of individuation: that of the lover; that of the beloved;

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41 Carson argues that this ambivalence goes hand in hand with literacy: “Literate training encourages a heightened awareness of personal physical boundaries and a sense of those boundaries as the vessel of one’s self. …For individuals to whom self-possession has become important, the influx of a sudden, strong emotion from without cannot be an unalarming event, as it may be in an oral environment where such incursions are the normal conductors of most of the important information that a person receives. When an individual appreciates that he alone is responsible for the content and coherence of his person, an influx like eros becomes a concrete personal threat” (*Eros the Bittersweet*, pp.44-45).
that of concepts, speeches, and virtues; and that of philosophy. As we saw last chapter, the
Symposium’s program focuses largely (though not exclusively) upon individuations of the latter
two types (the “offspring” of the lover), and evaluates the lover’s development in terms of his
capacity to collaborate with various instantiations of beauty in order to give birth. The Phaedrus,
conversely, describes the lover’s (and beloved’s) individuations in more immanent terms. In both
cases, the modifications proposed to conventional pederastic practice prove rather modest,
especially when compared to the accompanying theoretical overhaul. But this is because the
articulation and dissemination of these new concepts of eros suffice in themselves to
dramatically change the erotic system.

The introduction of new information produces a feedback loop: knowledge of the
Socratic concept of eros will induce the lover to pay closer attention to his own erotic
individuation, and in paying attention he cannot help but alter the course of this process (through
nontraditional interpretations and subsequent actions), which then requires further attention,
interpretation, and reflection. In other words, the signs circulating in the lover’s soul are sensitive
to whether or not anyone receives and deciphers them; through the actions he takes, he
determines retroactively what they “will have meant”. Similarly, Socrates-Stesichorus’ program
requires that the lover both attend to the beloved’s signs and interpret them in ways that tend to
affect the sorts of signs that are subsequently produced (most notably, by inducing reciprocal
desire in the beloved).

The virtual adventures of the soul

The most important information provided by the palinode concerns the constitution of the
virtual as such. Immediately after his taxonomy of divine madnesses, Socrates-Stesichorus offers
important information about three features of the virtual, namely, the soul, the gods, and the “beings beyond the heavens”. (Although he does not describe these things as “virtual”, I hope and believe that my account will provide convincing grounds for our doing so.) Let’s start with the soul.

The first thing that strikes us about the Socratic-Stesichorean description of the soul—apart from the argument for its immortality—is the impersonality of this thing to which we normally attribute the very essence of an individual’s personhood and personality. The soul lacks a proper name, sex, social status, city, species. We cannot say what it is made of, or even if it is made of anything at all. It seems that the most relevant thing to say of it is that it is self-changing (or self-moving). No doubt this is why Socrates-Stesichorus finds it so difficult to specify what the soul “is”, since it seems as yet to lack most of the determinations that normally permit us to define a thing.

The second part of the portrait of the soul introduces the image of the charioteer and his steeds. Specifically, the soul is compared to the “combined capacities [dunamei] of a team of winged horses and their winged charioteer.”\(^{42}\) The mention of “capacities” puts us on virtual terrain, for what is a capacity, if not the set of actions and affects available to the individual for actualization?\(^{43}\) To put it slightly differently—while tying together the two parts of Socrates-Stesichorus’ description—the soul comprises the capacities for self-movement (and, by extension, for individuation) virtually implicated within certain types of individual. We may also gather from this image that the soul contains several different elements that combine to produce

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\(^{42}\) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246a-b, emphasis mine.

\(^{43}\) The notion of capacity is especially helpful, I think, because it reminds us of the non-resemblance between virtual and actual, while suggesting the divergent virtualities implicated in a given actual state. The capacity to run, for example, does not itself “resemble” the act of running; what's more, the same material-energetic-psychic configuration can also implicate other capacities (the capacity to jump, for example, but also the capacity to compose a sonata or to fall in love).
not only a capacity for motion, but a capacity for divergent motions, not to mention disparate affects, which is to say that it is already somewhat differentiated. It’s a field or constellation of preindividual singularities and of incompossible lines of development (the latter of which find expression in the frequent arguments between charioteer and unruly steed that will characterize the enamored soul). By commencing his speech with these descriptions, Socrates situates the problem of *eros* in the context of an impersonal, polyvocal self that cannot be directly identified with the self of which we have everyday experience. In other words, the “I” that is the underlying “subject” of erotic experience does not neatly map onto any “I” that we could consider wholly our own.

   We have not yet discussed perhaps the important soulish capacity, namely, whatever it is that is expressed by its being winged. Since the “natural function of a wing is to carry what is heavy upward and raise it to the region where the race of the gods dwells,” however, we’ll be able to understand fully the nature of this capacity only after having investigated the nature of the gods and their region (including the beings beyond the heavens). So, then, what about the gods? Socrates-Stesichorus tells us flatly that we are unable to give a coherent account of an immortal being, but, although we have never seen and cannot adequately conceive of a god, we fashion an idea of a sort of immortal living being that has a soul and a body which are joined together eternally. But let that and the way it is spoken of be as suits the god."

Although he gives a nod to the traditional concept of immortal beings, it’s prefaced by the disclaimer that lacking any experiential or conceptual grasp of divinity, we cannot give a coherent account of it (which implies that the traditional account is itself incoherent). The fact that we have never seen and cannot adequately conceive of a god gives us a clue that here too, as

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44 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246d-e.
45 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246c-d.
in the case of the soul, we are dealing with virtual rather than actual entities. In any case, we must be satisfied with the same chariot-based image that was used for the soul, with the important modification that the divine charioteers have at their disposal well-matched and docile teams. Assuming that this image is intended to do the same work for the gods as it did for the soul, this means that divinity, too—whatever it may be—expresses a number of distinct possibilities for movement and affect, but without the incompossibility of developmental lines proper to mortal souls. Whether gods differ from ordinary souls in any other way remains to be seen.

The final items in this virtual inventory are the “heavens”, the place beyond the heavens, and the beings beyond the heavens. Since the myth so far has used the images of determinate physical things to express those things whose indeterminacy defies description, we can reasonably apply the same reading to the places described; that is, we may take Socrates-Stesichorus to be mapping onto familiar, extensive coordinates a set of events and neighborhoods that properly belong in a very different (intensive, virtual) spatium. The place beyond the heavens marks one extreme of this spatium—the purely virtual—while the surface of the earth marks the other—the wholly actual. Between the two lie the heavens themselves, the space of the passage-to-actualization in which most of the action takes place.

Concerning the strange beings beyond the heavens, our narrator reminds us once more of the limits of mortal knowledge, but in a more qualified fashion than was the case for the gods and the soul; here he merely indicates the incapacity of poetry to “sing worthily” of these things, leaving open the possibility that other forms of expression (for example, philosophy)

46 For the gods, one developmental line or way of being does not rule out the others—which is just what the myths of divine shape-shifting, or indeed, the fact of the coexistence of multiple variants of many of the myths, seem to suggest.

47 Plato, Phaedrus, 247c.
might manage to do so. “Intangible” and “without color or shape,”\textsuperscript{48} these entities seem to lack even the minimal determinations possessed by the gods and the soul. Yet they are nevertheless in some way differentiated, since the observer can distinguish between “justice”, “judiciousness”, “knowledge,” and “beauty”—to mention only the beings named by Socrates-Stesichorus. At this point I would like to suggest that these entities, far from being homogeneous and self-identical in any normal fashion, must somehow themselves contain or implicate innumerable and divergent lines of individuation, since one concrete instantiation of beauty (for example) does not necessarily resemble the others. (In what way could the beauty of a song or a city resemble that of the human beloved?) To say that each instantiates “the beautiful itself” or the Idea of beauty makes sense only if the instantiation relates to the Idea—and to other instantiations—through some mechanism other than resemblance. The unity and identity of each of the beings beyond the heavens therefore seems problematic in the sense already familiar to us from our earlier discussions of individuation: justice itself, beauty itself, and so forth constitute problems embodied, simultaneously with their more-or-less apt solutions, by the myriad actual just or beautiful individuals. According to such an interpretation (which we venture in the interests of our account of individuation), the beings beyond the heavens qualify as virtual entities, or Ideas in the sense elaborated by Deleuze.\textsuperscript{49} The spatium separating them from the earth would then

\textsuperscript{48} Plato, \textit{Phaedrus}, 247d-e.

\textsuperscript{49} In Deleuze the Idea—and virtuality in general—falls upon the side of \textit{becoming}. In contrast, we find in the palinode the claim that in contemplating these beings beyond the heavens one sees knowledge, “not the knowledge that is connected with becoming and varies with the varying things we now say are, but rather the knowledge that exists in the realm of what really is and really is knowledge.” Does this not imply a sharp distinction between “being” and “becoming” that would be simply inimical to Deleuze’s concept of the virtual? Fortunately this problem appears worse than it is. For Deleuze, “becoming” refers primarily to processes of individuation (and de-individuation, or the dissolving and deforming of identities), involving both virtual and actual components. In contrast, Socrates (and/or Plato) seems to associate becoming with the concrete transformations we observe in actuality. The critique of “becoming” hinted at here (but developed elsewhere in detail) implies an epistemological problem, which is that the observation of actuality alone, especially in instances of individuation, yields little or no knowledge. Any statement we make on this basis will not hold true indefinitely; nor can it explain the present individuation or predict individuations to come. In fact, the very
correspond to the space of passage and determination between problem and solution.

Now that we have established the claim to virtuality of the soul, the gods, and the beings beyond the heavens, we can chart the relationships between them. We’ll start once more with the soul, whose virtual existence includes several distinct kinds of activity. It moves across the heavens in the wake of its god, “appearing in different forms at different times, and [caring] for everything that lacks a soul”; it contemplates the “being that really is,” beyond the heavens; it gets embroiled with other souls, damages its wings, and tumbles into embodiment. These actions express a whole repertoire of different relations to the virtual and the actual. As it looks upon the beings beyond the heavens (the Ideas), the set of capacities that is the soul attempts to grasp or connect itself with the wholly virtual, problematic dimension of existing things; when it falls to earth, it finds expression in actuality. In between lies the to-and-fro, the care for singular individuals that requires attention both to the virtual and the actual.

(Somewhat tangentially, we should mention that even at the height of the soul’s wanderings, it seems in part already to gravitate toward the actual. This gets mythically expressed in the claim that the unruly horse “is heavy and, if it was not well trained by its charioteer, it sinks down and drags him toward the earth”. Yet even the better-natured steeds—of divine as well as of ordinary souls—seem somewhat “physicalized’ in this description. Among divine and ordinary souls alike it is the charioteers alone who draw nourishment from exposure to the Ideas; even the horses of the gods require an additional meal of “ambrosia and nectar” for

ability to make a statement presupposes some attunement to what exceeds actuality. But in this respect, at least, Deleuze and Socrates (Plato) seem to agree. To put it in Deleuze’s language, in order to get any further than transiently and superficially accurate description we need somehow to see beyond the actual—or rather, perhaps, to see through or into the actual to the immanent virtual principles and possibilities it incarnates.

51 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247c.
52 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247b.
their sustenance. This implies a minimal physicality—or, better, an inherent tendency towards actualization—on the part of the soul, even in its most rarefied engagement with the Ideas.)

The role of the gods within the myth becomes clearer when we map their movements in relation to those of the soul. In the flight across the heavens, the gods seem to perform the same functions as the ordinary soul. Only during their periodic contemplation of the Ideas do the gods manifest enhanced capacities. These capacities pertain especially to the superior vantage point from which divine contemplation takes place; even a god’s immunity to the loss of wings seems to follow from this, rather than from some intrinsic imperviousness to harm or change, since it is the jostling for a better view that damages the rest of the souls. The gods also function as trailblazers with respect to the souls that follow them, and thereby already express singular lines of individuation, since the particular trajectory followed by any given soul in the wake of its god leads to its unique perspective upon the Ideas and subsequently guides its embodied development. Returning to the question of what the myth is trying to show, we can hypothesize that whereas the soul’s activities signify the range of experiences within our capacity, those of the god mark an experiential upper limit we asymptotically approach. The god expresses both the virtual compossibility of the developmental lines between which we are forced to select in actualization, and the ideal, “complete” perspective upon those Ideas and problems of which we have only partial and limited perspectives. Yet the god also serves as a principle of selection: to follow a given god means to select a particular approach to the problems and questions constitutive of existence as such, and to privilege certain lines of individuation over all the others.

With our sketch of the virtual provisionally complete, a new question arises: What is the

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temporal relationship between the lover’s earthly existence and the soul’s virtual migrations? In what sense do these events precede actuality, and in what sense might they unfold contemporaneously with it? The short answer is that the soul’s flight occurs “prior” to its embodiment, albeit in an exceedingly strange manner—one that will be familiar to us, provided we keep in mind Schelling’s account of divine individuation. You will recall Schelling’s description of the emergence of a virtual modality of being, in which new images or “Ideas” circulated between the potencies of necessary nature. At this point we remained within an eternal present that preceded linear time, but in such a way as to coexist each passing moment, to persist precisely as the threshold of time.

Schelling’s account can provide a model for understanding the temporal structure of the events of the palinode. According to this model, the myth of the soul describes the virtual aspect of erotic individuation, that is, the events continually taking place as the virtual counterpart to whatever comes to pass in linear time. This helps to clarify the relationship of eros to the passage between virtuality and actuality—for the success of the love affair depends upon the lover’s capacity to perceive and negotiate this passage.

Which brings us at last to the matter of wings (and becoming-winged), a topic we earlier deferred. Our reading of the mythic events as contemporaneous with earthly life would make the meaning of becoming-winged immanent to embodiment. The soul does not first grow wings and subsequently traverse the heavens as two separate moments of linear time; instead, the new feathers springing up upon the surface of the soul are already sweeping the lover along behind his chosen god. For that matter, the virtual drama described sequentially by Socrates-Stesichorus must itself be conceived simultaneously in its entirety: all at once the soul is contemplating the

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54 Deleuze names these two times—the virtual, intensively differentiated time, and the actual, linear time—Aion and Chronos, respectively; cf. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.262/320.
virtual, plunging into the actual, and navigating the space between. Whereas the loss of wings expresses the descent into actuality and individuation, becoming-winged represents the flight into virtuality and the preindividual field.\textsuperscript{55} To repeat, the becoming-winged of the soul already transports it within the virtual, selects it into the singular trajectory of a god and affords it a unique perspective upon the Ideas. To say that \textit{eros} causes our wings to grow is to thus to say that in loving (or desiring) we achieve a special perspective upon virtuality—including and beginning with its relationship to what is actual. And if the lover’s soul becomes winged, it is in order that it might navigate the space of earthly love, conjugating itself with the Idea that manifests itself in actuality as the beautiful beloved.

\textit{Beauty and individuation}

We saw in the first chapter that individuals retain a relationship—in truth, a friendship, however unconscious or neglected—with the systems that produced them. Yet most individuals possess a finite capacity for individuation, the exhaustion of which limits development beyond a certain point. The question then becomes: what renewal or intensification of their friendship with the virtual would unleash further individuations? The \textit{Phaedrus} and \textit{Symposium} agree upon one answer, which is that the encounter with \textit{beauty} (particularly that of the beloved) acts as a powerful catalyst for individuation in adult individuals. In fact, if we are to believe Diotima, beauty plays a double role in erotic individuation, since it begins by bestowing upon \textit{eros} itself its specificity in relation to \textit{epithumia}, desire in general. But what grants the event of visible (physical) beauty this power of catalyzing the becoming-winged of the beholder’s soul?

“Beauty itself” is one of the Ideas, yet it is said to differ from the other Ideas in one

\textsuperscript{55} To put it in (playfully) Heraclitean terms, “the way up and the way down are the same,” since the same soul undergoes both movements simultaneously.
important respect, namely, that of all the Ideas, it is “most manifest to sense and loveliest of them all.”\textsuperscript{56} The Greek word translated here as “loveliest” is \textit{erasmiotaton}, which shares its root with the noun \textit{erros}, and which we might therefore also translate as “the most loved”.\textsuperscript{57} Beauty, in other words, is the most loved (or “lovable”) aspect of being, the most enchanting problem. Yet, as the use of the superlative (“loveliest”) clearly indicates, the other Ideas are \textit{also} lovely, and hence—to one in a position to behold them—“beautiful”.\textsuperscript{58} We still need to determine the “specificity” of beauty \textit{qua} Idea.

As Sallis shows, beauty’s intrinsic “lovability” has meaning only in the context of bodily existence and actuality:

\begin{quote}
What, from the human standpoint, distinguishes the beautiful…is not simply that in itself the beautiful shines more brilliantly for those in attendance at the divine banquet. …What distinguishes the beautiful is that it shines \textit{in the region of the visible}…and thus renders being accessible to man in his condition of being bound to the visible through his body.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

As we saw earlier, virtuality and the problematic Ideas it contains have their existence solely in their actualizations or “cases of solution” in which they “insist and persist”: all Ideas \textit{occur}, and the capacities called “soul” tend inexorably toward actualization in and as concrete individuals. The experience of beauty, I would argue, is precisely the experience of virtuality in its excess to the given singular forms of its actualization; and, insofar as the excess of the virtual over the actual consists solely in the passage-to-actualization, beauty is this passage itself made manifest as a fragmentary surplus dimension \textit{of} the manifest, the glimmer of the edges of a virtual multiplicity as it crystallizes or precipitates into an actual state of affairs. This would mean that,

\textsuperscript{56} Plato, \textit{Phaedrus}, 250c; this translation is found in Sallis, \textit{Being and Logos}, p.156.
\textsuperscript{58} We find evidence for this line of reasoning in the \textit{Symposium}, where Socrates (quoting Diotima) claims that the devoted disciple of love will learn to see the beauty of soul (which would presumably consist in such qualities as justice, courage, wisdom, etc.) shining through even those human beings who are not physically beautiful.
\textsuperscript{59} Sallis, \textit{Being and Logos}, p.156, emphasis mine.
in experiencing a person or thing as “beautiful”, we are experiencing reality itself, the very articulation or fold of reality, as “lovable”.

And so it is not hard to see why the encounter with the bearer of such beauty strikes the lover so profoundly. By illuminating the virtual as such, the beloved’s beauty lures the lover’s attention beyond actuality; by embodying an Idea (“the beautiful itself”), the beloved actively engages the lover with the problematic side of reality; finally, by showing flashes of concealed divinity, the beloved makes concrete one possible way of living this newfound attunement to the virtual. In other words, the encounter with the beloved already affords both a singular perspective upon the problem that this individual is, and the promise of the amplification or multiplication of this perspective (a “god’s-eye-view”). It also makes clear to the lover that the problem embodied by the beloved is one in which he himself shares: the secret kinship that makes the beauty of this beloved so alluring is the bond of a shared question.

What grants the possible worlds of the beloved their unparalleled attraction for the lover is the fact that some obscure thread drawn by the god seems to pass through both the beloved’s worlds and his own, stitching them together. The challenge to actualize the divinity in his beloved is also a challenge to actualize the divinity within himself. In doing so, the lover helps to create the truth (the beloved’s godlike nature and his own) of which the beloved’s beauty and his own desire are the signs, so that beauty signals what will have been true if the lover’s project succeeds. As Socrates says, the devotees of Zeus “draw refreshing drink from Zeus”—that is, begin to actualize the singular line of individuation drawn by the god—“and, like the devotees of Bacchus, pour it into the soul of their beloved, making him as similar as possible to their god.”

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60 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 253a-b. The word translated “as similar as possible”, (*homoiotaton*) comes from *homoios*, which can also mean “equal”. Although presumably Plato does not mean that a human being becomes equal to a divine being, we might—in the context of our account of individuation—understand the mutual transformation of lover and beloved as the potentially infinite project of becoming-equal to the problem the god represents.
The individuation of the lover therefore takes form of the development of new habits, perhaps even of new knowledge, and is accompanied by a parallel individuation of the beloved. But this describes only what takes place in extensity. Intensively, the most important development is the becoming-winged of the soul, which is itself the creation of new intensities and the conjugation of these intensities with the virtual, or the preindividual milieu. The intensively differentiated problem that “objectively” manifests as beauty—and as the flow of beauty from beloved to lover—manifests “subjectively” as the sudden flush of desire upon the lover’s soul that sets it flying toward the ideas. And although the extensive results of individuation—the lover and beloved’s mutual discovery of a way of life equal to a divinely posed problem—doubtless have value in themselves, Socrates-Stesichorus makes it clear that the intensive side of things, the growth of wings and concomitant engagement with the virtual, is a still more precious gift of eros. Not simply to bring the virtual into actuality, but to move back across that passage, detecting the virtual problems incarnated in actuality and contemplating them for their own sake: this is the freedom of the enamored soul, and the great reward immanent to sustained desire.

Other individuations

As we mentioned at the outset of our discussion of individuation, lover and beloved are not the only individuals produced or affected by erotic systems. Diotima mentions speeches (logoi) and virtue as products of the course of individuation she describes; more generally, the Socratic-Platonic erotic system seems to have further individuated the practice and discourse of philosophy itself.

Amorous discourse—like any discourse—follows its own line of development. Every
word we speak, even the most banal, emerges against a backdrop of incompossible *logoi*; actual utterances bear within them the traces of the utterances they preclude or presage. My “I love you” is haloed by the “I love you not”s of past and future, just as the lover’s moments of sincerity, courage, honesty, passion, and devotion coexist alongside those moments of bad faith, cowardice, deception, indifference, and neglect that are equally a part of erotic love.

As a further complication—and to return to a problem we’ve already broached—even in our most passionate statements we cannot help speaking for the assemblage as a whole. It’s not that the utter unoriginality of an “I love you” makes it any less sincere—on the contrary, much of its force comes from its formulaic nature. The “I love you” can resound throughout the erotic system like the creation of a new world (which it is, when it announces and affirms the production of a world shared in common between lover and beloved). The problem is not one of sincerity, or even of originality, but one of *singularity*: how do we find or invent the discourse expressive of *this* love affair? How do we discover the unique names for one another, the rhythm of dialogue, even the distinctive quarrels and insults proper to our love? When they do come to light, it’s seldom through conscious invention; laboriously or spontaneously, they arise as more-or-less successful solutions to the problems populating the erotic system as a whole.

As was the case with the information introduced into the system by the Socratic program in his description of the lover's “symptoms”, erotic discourse reacts back upon the system it is “about”, and in numerous ways. And part of what makes this discourse so dangerous, so daring and cautious, tender and cruel—despite or because of our best or worst intentions—is that we can very seldom predict with *complete* certainty just what the effects of any given statement will be. Consider again the “I love you”. Sometimes it produces the very state of affairs it claims to describe (as when the lover’s “I love you” makes his love actual for the beloved, and perhaps
even for himself—for he may not have known for certain whether he truly loved until he said the words). Sometimes, on the contrary, it announces the end of the love it claims to affirm (the lover says “I love you” and realizes only in the saying that this is the last time he will say it, for it has already ceased to be true). Sometimes it simply affirms and sustains the system for a little while longer. But the same feedback mechanism applies to more mundane utterances, including those that are not explicitly “about” the system: each has the potential to set intensive systemic differences into new communications by modifying the system’s self-understanding.

Thus far we have been discussing the sort of discourse that could circulate between any two (or more) individuals in any erotic system; but what about the special philosophical discourse recommended in the Socratic erotic systems? What are its distinctive traits? In the first place, we should note that erotic actualization here tends to privilege discursive, rather than strictly physical or practical, lines of development. Lover and beloved engage in philosophical dialogue\(^{61}\) (dialectical intercourse) as an integral aspect of the individuating process, and the discursive products of their engagement therefore count as individuals produced by the system. (This was, of course, what allowed Socrates-Diotima to situate philosophical \(eros\) within the schema of production.) What’s more, the philosophical conversations or speeches of lover and beloved deal with the very relationship between actual and virtual that their erotic experience has helped bring into focus for them. In this way philosophical dialogue simultaneously expresses, explains, and further problematizes their relationship.

In the *Symposium*’s ladder of love this type of discursive production becomes increasingly important as the lover ascends. Once he has learned to find erotic charm in beautiful

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\(^{61}\) Alcibiades confirms this practice, explaining that contrary to his expectations, his private conversations with Socrates took the same form as those held in the company of others (cf. Plato, *Symposium*, 217b).
souls, he must “engender and seek such speeches as will make the young [beloved] better”; later, attuned to the “vast open sea of the beautiful,” he gives birth to “many beautiful and magnificent speeches and thoughts.” Much like the products of biological reproduction, each of these discursive “individuals” prompts further individuation on the part of its “parent” and of anyone else who might be listening (or reading), for each is itself a set of further instructions for engagement with the virtual. To give just one example, when the lover formulates the thesis that all beautiful things form a single system, this will affect his subsequent interpretations and actions within this system, and his treatment of all existing individual beautiful things.

Both dialogues also bear witness to the individuation of the style or styles appropriate to this new philosophical discourse. As we saw last chapter, the three speeches of the *Phaedrus* decode and deterritorialize standard poetic tropes, while the second half of the dialogue explicitly reflects upon the prerequisites for speaking and writing well. The *Symposium* contains a similarly heterogeneous mixture of dialogue, narrative, rhetoric, science, myth, and poetry, as each speaker strives to find the mode of speech appropriate to the matter at hand, often borrowing from the *logoi* of others. Multiple voices and styles permit interlocutors and readers to measure the Socratic discourse against others that claim to speak the truth about *eros*; this discourse reveals its distinctive traits most clearly in contrast with such a background. To push the point further, when we consider the dialogues as themselves products of an erotic system (namely, the system of Socrates and his many lovers, among them Plato), the fact that these writings

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63 Plato, *Symposium*, 210d.
64 Of necessity, this list is incomplete and misses the way in which each of these discourses both borders upon and infiltrates the others.
65 For example, Socrates’ brief discussions with Agathon before and after the latter’s speech seem all the more incisive when compared to the speech they frame, neatly cutting it down to size—and demonstrating the superiority of Socratic style over its Agathonian counterpart.
66 In the case of the *Phaedrus*, Nussbaum suggests a further twist, which is that the relationship described in the
deliberately gather together and set into resonance different modes of speech implies that philosophy (or at least this practice of philosophy) may well require multiple voices and a patchwork of styles for its functioning. Socratic-Platonic dialectic profits from the “external” supplement of rhetoric, myth, and poetry, even when it chooses explicitly to disavow this profit; and some would argue that, far from being external or intrinsic, these elements have existed inseparably within dialectic since its birth, and that a pure or “proper” dialectic would be an impossibility.67

A final thought on what it would take to give a philosophical or poetic or simply passionate account of eros. Upon reflection, it seems that the character of philosophical logoi of eros (such as that of the Phaedrus or the Symposium) owes at least as much to erotic exigencies as it does to philosophical ones. (Not, of course, that we could necessarily ever quite distinguish between the two in writings such as these, or in our readings of them.) The apocryphal “Homeric” couplet cited by Socrates in the palinode serves as a decent example of what it's like to talk about eros:

Mortals do indeed call the winged one Eros [Love],
But immortals call him Pteros [Feathered], because he necessarily develops wings.68

As Carson points out, the meter of the second line is thrown out of joint by the name of the god, and this is not coincidental: “Eros' wings mark a critical difference between gods and man, for they defy human expression. Our words are too small, our rhythms too restrictive.”69

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67 Derrida has extensively analyzed the ways in which certain metaphorical/mythological tropes have shaped and haunted much of Western philosophy from its inception; cf. Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy, in Margins of Philosophy, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
68 Plato, Phaedrus, 252c.
69 She remarks, further, that to participate in eros is to be party to a dangerous deal: “Plato's bit of botched epic verse epitomizes our human transaction with Eros. Its terms are wrenching. We may profit [by] enlargement of
overflows any single discourse; allowing it to fracture our customary usages is one way to express both the excess itself and the impossibility of containing it. Our saying of *eros* takes on a fragmentary quality, much like the fragment of divine naming (*Pteros*) embedded within the mortal poetry of the couplet.

But *eros* also moves transversally, playing across multiple virtual and actual worlds and the multiple divergent lines of individuation for the self or selves of the lover, beloved, and the actual world(s) they make between them. No one line of development, however faithful or promiscuous, ever exhausts or even reveals all of these worlds. To speak this reality—as lovers, philosophers, or poets—we need a language that is supple, pluralist, and at least dimly cognizant of its own fragmentary quality. Not that this could somehow adequately supplement the incompletion of the erotic system—it can't—but it can at least help us not to forget that such incompletion or disequilibrium is the system's very life.

So much for the discursive individuations produced within erotic systems. We should say a further word about virtue, although we've already touched on this point in our discussion of the lover and beloved's individuations. In both the palinode and Diotima's speech, the erotic relationship is said to serve as a locus for the genesis of “virtue” (*arete*), the production not just of beautiful speeches, but of beautiful deeds, and especially of the particular capacity, the *excellence*, of soul and body that would be capable of such deeds. In this avowed fealty to virtue, Socrates—or his alter-egos Stesichorus and Diotima—appear to remain well within the tradition of conventional pederasty. His programs depart from this tradition, however, in two substantial ways, neither of which is made particularly explicit in the text. In the first place, and as we've already seen, the person whose virtue is primarily at stake is not the beloved, but the

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meaning, by admitted Eros in his true godly form as Pteros, but only at the cost of the formal beauty of our line of verse” (Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, p.163).
lover; although the lover does act as a pedagogue to his beloved (particularly in the palinode),
this is only on the basis of the lover's own prior and ongoing erotic apprenticeship to the god (or
the beautiful), an apprenticeship at least partially mediated by his experiences with the boy. In
the second place, the specific “virtues” produced by Socratic pederasty might be quite different
from those of its conventional counterpart. The conventional pederast simply initiates his
beloved into the pre-existing values and practices of their society (or at worst, diverges from
these values in relatively predictable ways); in a Socratic relationship, by contrast, the values
transmitted must first be discovered (or even created). In the Socratic relationship not only is the
lover not assumed to know a priori what virtue is, but there is no guarantee that anyone yet fully
knows—an unsettling claim. And although the virtues discovered are said to be “divine”, they
are by no means necessarily the ones common to or compatible with the existing social
assemblage. This erotic system therefore seems capable of giving rise to new forms of virtue,
forms which, taken as a larger system in themselves, as a way of life, might very well have found
their earliest proponent in the historical person of Socrates himself. (The flip-side of this is, of
course, the possibility of new forms of vice, or of virtues that when viewed from some
perspectives—including that of the existing social assemblage—would be indiscernible from
vices; we could here allude to condemnation of Socrates as an impious “corruptor of the youth”

Finally, we have seen that for both the program of the Phaedrus and that of the

70 Though unsettling, this claim is very much in keeping with the aporetic tone and results of the other dialogues
devoted to the specific virtues. We have grown accustomed to this idea, but within the context of the pederastic
tradition it is new and potentially subversive.

71 For example, in the Phaedrus, the loving couple is said to live “an orderly life” and to have “friendship with
wisdom” [philosophia] (256a-b), and we witness their chastity or temperance (sophrosune) in the face of erotic
temptation, but nothing is said of justice or of courage; moreover, as I mentioned in the last chapter, Socrates-
Stesichorus gives us little reason to assume that his program will produce particularly good citizens. Diotima's
speech in the Symposium is even vaguer, referring to “beautiful practices” and “virtue” in general. And although
it is possible for us to assume that she means by this all of (and only) the conventional virtues, Socrates' own
unconventional lifestyle—and the threat, real or imagined, that it presented to so many of his contemporaries—
suggests some revolutionary potential lurking in this seemingly conventional talk of virtue.
Symposium the progress of the lover seems closely connected to his engagement with philosophy: the best lover, the one who fully reaps the rewards of eros and leads his beloved to do the same, will be the philosophical lover. Not only is philosophy erotic, but eros is philosophical. This means that at least in these dialogues, the individuation of lover and beloved includes and is bound up with the individuation of one or both as philosophers. And this claim also adds an important dimension to the individuation of the philosopher him- (or her-) self as a public figure within the ancient Athenian social assemblage, an individuation that historically unfolded upon multiple levels. We said quite a lot about this question in the last chapter, in which we suggested that the Symposium's portrait of the philosopher as pederast may be strategically motivated, and thus somewhat partial. Elsewhere when Socrates describes the philosopher as a kind of lover, the eros for human individuals is simply one among several types of eros sharing certain attributes with the philosopher's love for wisdom. And this love is in the end a philia.

We ought therefore to preface any claims about the relationship between erotic and philosophical individuation in these dialogues with the acknowledgment that this relationship is a very complex one, and that any possible account of it will almost certainly be partial and fragmentary. With that said, here are a few observations. First of all, when we consider the capacity of erotic systems to produce philosophers, it seems that this (always at least somewhat

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I have in mind in particular the discussion between Socrates and Glaucon at 474c in Book V of the Republic, in which Socrates argues for the necessary breadth of the philosopher's love for learning by insisting on the parallel between this and other forms of love. Glaucon is initially confused by Socrates' claim that “when we say a man loves something, if it is rightly said of him, he mustn’t show a love for one part of it and not for another, but must cherish all of it”; to clarify his point (and win his interlocutor's assent), Socrates reminds him that “all boys in the bloom of youth in one way or another put their sting in an erotic lover of boys” (474d). Although this example seems sufficient to persuade Glaucon, Socrates proceeds to give additional examples of indiscriminate desires (for wine and honor, to be precise), the effect of which is to downplay any special connection between love of wisdom and erotic love of human individuals. And when there subsequently arises a question as to which sort of lover counts as a philosopher, the confusion is not between the lover of wisdom and the pederast, but between the lover of wisdom and the “lovers of sights and hearing” (475d) (i.e., patrons of the theatre). This is not the place, however, for us to go into the question of the status of eros in the Republic (although we've already seen the interlocutors of that dialogue raise doubts about the compatibility of eros and civic virtue); I cite this passage simply as a reminder that the connection between eros and philosophy is by no means as close everywhere in Plato as it tends to appear in the Phaedrus and Symposium.
unreliable) mode of production is not the *only* productive process giving such results. Careful attention to erotic signs—or devotion to the initiatory program outlined by Diotima\(^{73}\)—*might* make of the lover a philosopher, but not necessarily; it seems possible, on the other hand, to become a philosopher without ever experiencing a particularly intense erotic relationship with another human being.\(^{74}\) Secondly, in terms of the development of the philosopher as a distinct public persona, the link between *eros* and philosophy appears equally contingent. I believe it would be too simplistic to say that the pederastic “form of expression” served exclusively as a camouflage for the subversive nature of Socrates’ interactions with his young followers; I’d rather suggest that, when sufficiently de- and re-coded and territorialized, conventional pederasty becomes virtually indistinguishable from Socratic pedagogy. Socrates is thus less a philosopher hiding in pederast's clothing than one possible product of the wide margin of variation immanent to the tradition of pederastic practice. The model of lover and beloved engaged jointly in philosophy truly does help us to grasp the peculiarly passionate and intimate relationships that can emerge between teacher and pupil, as well as the responsibilities and dangers that arise in such a context. (If nothing else, it provides an alternate pedagogical model to that of the sophists.) On the other hand, we should probably not take the types of relationship described in the palinode or in Diotima's speech as anything more than partial descriptions of what *some* successful modes of philosophical practice might look like.

\(^{73}\) If these practices turn out to be distinct from one another, that is. But on what basis would Diotima’s apprenticeship to the beautiful concretely proceed, if not that of the emission, reception, and interpretation of signs?

\(^{74}\) The classic example here would be that of Socrates himself, whose need to study under Diotima suggests (as Rosen points out) an erotic deficiency with respect to other human beings, a deficiency that does not seem to have prevented his development as a philosopher. Cf. Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, p.222.
IV. ...But Does It Work? The Case of Alcibiades

Confronted with the erotic programs presented in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, we are likely to have a couple of questions. The first concerns how well this style of erotics functioned in the socio-historical context within which it arose (and to which it was presumably intended to apply); the second concerns how the understanding of *eros* maps onto our own understanding of love, both in an everyday sense, and in the more technical sense elucidated in my first chapter. We will attempt to address the second question in the conclusion; meanwhile, we shall tackle the first question by examining the case of Socrates' second most famous lover/beloved: Alcibiades.

The Alcibiades of the *Symposium* is interesting to us precisely because he describes, from the beloved’s point of view, what it is like to engage in Socratic eroticism. He is a product of an individuating system who is able to recount for us at least some of the processes that have shaped him. What’s more, he stands in a unique relationship to the Athenian assemblage, one of love and treachery, at once entrenched in the strata and profoundly deterritorialized, endangering and saving the city by turns; situated at the edge of the assemblage in this way, he might be able to tell us more about its interactions with Socratic *eros* than someone either more firmly stratified (such as the conventional pederasts) or more thoroughly deterritorialized (such as Socrates himself).

My treatment of Alcibiades’ speech will proceed along two lines. On the one hand, I will attempt to show that exposure to the Socratic erotic program played a significant part in his development; on the other, I will suggest that Alcibiades’ attitudes toward Socrates (and Socratic *eros*) tell us something important about the destabilizing and disconcerting effects of Socratic pederasty upon the assemblage.

Let us return to the scene of Agathon’s banquet. Socrates has only barely finished
speaking, and is about to field questions from his (perhaps not entirely convinced) audience, when a singular arrival disrupts both the theoretical discussion and the circle of praise. Enter Alcibiades, staggering drunk, crowned with ivy and violets, accompanied by a flute girl and other riffraff, and in no mood to partake of refined conversation. Having initiated a flow of wine to liven up the proceedings he agrees to follow protocol and deliver a speech of praise, but with a twist: rather than praising Eros, he will praise Socrates.

For our purposes, the key components of this praise are Alcibiades’ account of his liaison with Socrates, and the two highly suggestive “likenesses” he uses to describe his former mentor. Alcibiades begins by comparing Socrates to a silenus. Although he means this explicitly in the sense of a certain type of little hollow statue of the god (about which more later), the term is hardly free of its original reference to wild, drunken followers of Dionysus. Having introduced this image, however, he drops it temporarily in favor of a new likeness: Socrates is like the satyr Marsyas, that prodigious flute player who challenged Apollo to a contest and was flayed alive for his hubris. The most salient elements of the Marsyas story will find their counterparts in the hubristic character of Socrates’ erotics, in the seductive “music” of the Socratic logos, and in Alcibiades’ attempt to strip away the deceptive coverings of Socrates to reveal the treasures inside.

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75 Much could be said about this crown: as Martha Nussbaum points out, the ivy is a mark of Dionysus, while the violet was something like the “state flower” of Athens, in addition to being a sign of both Aphrodite and the Muses: thus he appears simultaneously as the god and as a representative of the polis, or the demos, as erotic and as “musical” (at the very least, he is a slave to Socrates’ flute-playing) (cf. Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, p.193). Of crowns in general, Calasso writes that the ancient Greeks used them to enclose the sacred, the perfect “in its self-sufficient fullness”, but this mark brought with it danger: long before crowns were handed out at banquets, they were placed upon animals marked for sacrifice. “The crown was a mobile templum, bringing together election and danger” (cf. Calasso, The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony, pp.111-112). It is perhaps not surprising that brilliant, doomed Alcibiades would appear crowned; nor that he would offer a crown to the (equally brilliant, equally doomed) Socrates.

76 Given the resemblance between Socrates-Diotima’s description of Eros and Socrates himself, it might amount to the same thing in the end.
At the center of these concerns is the question of Socratic hubris.\textsuperscript{77} Alcibiades mentions hubris in connection with either Socrates or his actions on no fewer than four occasions,\textsuperscript{78} and there are multiple senses in which we may understand this accusation. First of all, as we saw in the last chapter, the accusation of hubris was often connected with a violation of a citizen’s physical boundaries. Such violation amounted to nothing less than a threat to democratic equality.\textsuperscript{79} Although Socrates inflicted no such physical breach upon the young Alcibiades, the latter does seem to have suffered—and to continue to suffer—from an analogous \textit{psychic} penetration. The Socratic \textit{logos} has infected him like the venom of a snakebite. In a curious twist upon the standard poetic trope, desire flows not from the eyes of the beloved philosopher, but from his mouth. Whereas the lover is first inflamed by the flow of beauty emanating from the beloved, Alcibiades’ becoming-lover takes the form of a state of intolerable irritation, even self-laceration, induced by a flow of words.

Beyond this psychical violation, Socrates’ treatment of Alcibiades strikes the latter as hubristic for a second reason: Socrates behaved indifferently toward the young man’s physical beauty, rather than paying what Alcibiades would consider appropriate tribute to it. There may be more to this complaint than the wounding of youthful vanity. The issue for Alcibiades was that Socrates did not desire him for that which he considered most desirable in himself.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{77} It’s hard for us to miss the humor of this situation. If we are to believe Plutarch, Alcibiades was himself a master of using a seductive false appearance to his advantage in his dealings with others; he was also notorious for acts of hubris against his fellow citizens, acts ranging from physical assault to sexual outrage. Who better, then, to bring against his former mentor the charges of hubris and fraudulent appearances? And what does it tell us about Socratic hubris that even someone as disruptive as Alcibiades would find it beyond the pale? I am indebted to Wohl (\textit{Love among the Ruins}, pp.136-140) for highlighting this aspect of Alcibiades’ character.

\textsuperscript{78} At 216 b: “You [Socrates] are hubristic, are you not?”; 219c: Socrates “laughed at my youthful beauty and committed an outrage [\textit{hubris}] against it”; 221e: Socrates’ speeches are encased in deceptively laughable words and phrases, like “the very hide of a hubristic satyr”; 222a, “he committed an outrage [\textit{hubrisan}] against me”.

\textsuperscript{79} Cf. pp.88-89 above.

\textsuperscript{80} Alcibiades acknowledges that “[he] used to take an amazing amount of pride in [his] youthful beauty” (217a). If his distress at Socrates’ emphasis on “inner beauty” puzzles us, we might view this as the flip side of a common
inspires Socratic *eros* for an individual is the soul, but we have argued that the soul is simply the individual’s as-yet-unactualized virtuality: the fragment of a god that they bear unknowingly, the impersonal or preindividual singularity that in an important sense is not yet—and never fully will be—their “own”, since it is that very capacity for further individuation which can never be wholly exhausted in actuality. To be desired for something that one cannot identify as truly one’s own: how could this not seem like an outrageous insult to everything that one already actually is?

There is, moreover, a further dimension to Socratic hubris. Through his indifference—be it genuine or feigned⁸²—both to Alcibiades’ physical beauty and to the young man’s increasingly overt advances, Socrates disrupts the mechanism of exchange governing the conventional pederastic relationship. To Alcibiades, Socrates justifies this refusal to play by the rules by posing two alternatives: Either he truly possesses the great psychic beauty Alcibiades believes he has glimpsed, or he does not. In the first case, in granting his sexual favors Alcibiades will have “cheated” his lover (by trading inferior for superior goods); in the second, Alcibiades will have sacrificed his virtue for someone unworthy. No matter which turns out to be the case, the exchange will have been a bad bargain for at least one of the parties involved.

The first alternative points to a problem we have already encountered, an economic problem (as it were) concerning asymmetrical erotic relationships as conventionally conceived: they involve the exchange of unequal goods, unequal because different in kind. We have seen that Socrates’ solution to this problem is to reframe the relationship in terms other than those of

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⁸¹ Lacan analyzes this problem—that of the *agalma*—extensively in *Le transfert.*
⁸² As Bloom wryly points out, Socrates’ physical indifference would seem to have been genuine. By his own confession, Alcibiades maneuvered his prey into a few situations—nude wrestling sessions, sleeping in the same bed—in which the physical manifestation of desire “would have been impossible to hide...if it were there” (Bloom, “The Ladder of Love,” in *Plato's Symposium*, translated by Seth Benardete, p.161).
exchange. In the palinode, the lover profits not from the sexual gratification offered by the beloved, but by the effects immanent to desire; on the ladder of love, lover and beloved do not trade services but rather collaborate in the production of psychical “offspring”.

The second alternative highlights the epistemological problem presented earlier by Pausanias: how can the boy be certain that his lover deserves gratification, that he will not have traded his virtue for an illusory good? (Then again, when do we ever have enough knowledge to justify committing ourselves irrevocably to an erotic project?) Despite the attempts of Socrates and his “alter-egos” Stesichorus and Diotima to guarantee the worthiness of the lover, the inherent limits upon an erotic system’s self-knowledge make questionable the value of any such guarantee (as we shall soon see). The surest course of action—upon which Socrates himself insists—is therefore to defer indefinitely the moment of physical consummation.

To us this concern for the beloved’s virtue may seem admirable, and the liberation of eros from the exchange economy may appear to be a great leap forward. For one such as Alcibiades, very much a product of the Athenian assemblage and still caught within the conventional view of erotic matters, it is utterly bewildering. At first the young man has confidence that his youthful beauty and the promise of sexual gratification will suffice as currency with which to purchase Socrates’ secrets. So Socrates’ moderation, therefore, comes not as a welcome reprieve from unpleasant sexual labor, but rather as the removal from play of what Alcibiades had considered to be his sole bargaining chip. By leaving the young man’s virtue thoroughly intact, Socrates also leaves him powerless.83

83 It’s tempting to reproach Alcibiades for his misunderstanding of the unique form of relationship offered to him by Socrates. At no point, after all, does Socrates threaten to cease his interactions with Alcibiades on the grounds that the latter apparently has nothing to offer him in return; why, then, is it so important for Alcibiades to “pay” for what Socrates appears willing to give him for free? I would suggest that conventional ideas about education tended to territorialize upon the circuit of exchange in such a way that the price one paid for it—be it a monetary fee for the teacher of rhetoric, or a sexual favor for the pederastic pedagogue—served as some
In any case, here we have the third manifestation of Socratic hubris: he steps outside the bounds of accepted pederastic practice, not only breaking the rules, but doing so in such a way as to change the game entirely. Perhaps most outrageously of all, his erotics bring about the inversion of lover and beloved; Alcibiades refers to this phenomenon more or less openly at several points over the course of the speech,\textsuperscript{84} thereby confirming at least part of what the palinode predicted.\textsuperscript{85} Unfortunately, in contrast to the beloved described in the palinode (who seems relatively unperturbed by his lover’s unorthodox approach and its effects), Alcibiades finds his suitor’s behavior disconcerting, insulting, outrageous—in a word, hubristic. It is not difficult to imagine the many other young recipients of Socrates’ attentions reacting in a similar way.\textsuperscript{86}

Marsyas the satyr-flautist challenged Apollo and was flayed alive for his hubris; the penalty Alcibiades attempts to inflict upon Socrates takes an analogous form.\textsuperscript{87} He cannot psychically penetrate Socrates in the way he had once desired, in a way that would even the score between them, but he can do his best to strip Socrates, his erotics, and his speeches of their protective appearances to reveal something quite different within.

\textsuperscript{84} See, for example, Alcibiades’ testimony that “I invited him then to join me at supper, simply as a lover plots against his beloved” (217c), and his assertion that Socrates “brings it about that he is the beloved rather than the lover” (222b).

\textsuperscript{85} The account of the Alcibiades-Socrates affair seems at first to follow closely the model relationship described in the palinode. At the pivotal moment, however—the moment of Alcibiades’ becoming-lover—the tonality shifts, because the young man knows only how to be a lover of the kind critiqued in the first two speeches of the \textit{Phaedrus}. With the lover’s role played by one to whom the erotic insights of the palinode remain opaque, the script set out in the latter changes dramatically.

\textsuperscript{86} Alcibiades assures us that his is far from a unique case: “And what is more, he not only did this to me, but to Charmides the son of Glaucon, Euthydemus the son of Diocles, and many many others” (Plato, \textit{Symposium}, 222b).

\textsuperscript{87} I am indebted to Nussbaum for this insight; cf. \textit{Fragility of Goodness}, pp.165, 189.
Now, given that Alcibiades has nothing but praise for Socrates’ moderation, courage, and wisdom, it might seem like a stretch to call this revelation of interiors a punishment, or to compare it to being flayed. Surely when Alcibiades asks Eryximachus whether he should “assault” Socrates and “take vengeance on him” this is nothing more than banter? We must consider, however, the extent to which the appearances Socrates cultivated may have functioned as protective camouflage. What does Socrates gain by playing the pederast? Quite simply, pederasty offers a socially sanctioned form of interaction with young men that differs from the model of the sophists and teachers of rhetoric (with whom, as we see in the Sophist, Socrates otherwise risks confusion). What benefit does the homely quality of his speeches confer upon them? It’s a way to slip potentially revolutionary concepts under the radar, gripping the souls of receptive listeners while lulling the fears of the sort of person who would later accuse him of inventing new gods. (As Alcibiades tells us, Socrates speaks of “pack-asses, blacksmiths, shoemakers, and tanners, and it looks as if he is always saying the same things through the same things”; hearing such commonplace speeches, the enemies of philosophy laugh and move on, none the wiser.) As for his own unlovely external appearance—well, what better way to conceal the fact that he is more truly a beloved than a lover, with the power to awaken unsanctioned desire in the young men supposed to be immune to such a thing?

I would argue, therefore, that whether or not Alcibiades is fully aware of it, his unmasking of Socrates has the potential to do significant harm to the latter by revealing the revolutionary content of his way of life. Socrates-Marsyas challenges the stratified Athenian
assemblage with his deterritorializing music that threatens to carry off all the best young men, to psychically penetrate them, to make of them philosophical kinaidoi unfit for politics—and the outraged polis strikes back, in the person of Alcibiades.

Neither of the erotic programs mapped out by Socrates predicts this violent reaction. How could things have gone so badly off the rails? In order to answer this question, we need to examine the full extent of Alcibiades’ erotic individuation. Here, too, the image of Marsyas proves helpful. There is a tradition—related to us by Plutarch—that Alcibiades hated the flute, denouncing it as “an instrument unworthy of a free man’s dignity”. As Nussbaum points out, this is exceedingly interesting in light of the fact that Plato’s Alcibiades not only characterizes Socrates as a flautist (and enters accompanied by a flute girl), but refers to himself twice in terms of “slavishness” or “enslavement”. Let us examine these references more closely. At 215e he refers to the “slavish condition” of his soul, laid bare by Socrates’ logoi; at 219e he describes himself as “enslaved by this human being as no one has been by anyone else”. What is the connection between these two forms of slavery?

We might understand the first instance by turning to the account of political and psychic individuation found in books eight and nine of the Republic. We should note, first of all, that the strength, nature, and management of desire(s) have a decisive effect upon the individuation of souls and cities—and especially of those characterized by their deviation from the ideal. The “type” that seems best to correspond to what we know of Alcibiades’ character as a young man is that of the democrat, whom Socrates describes as living along

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92 For my discussion of Alcibiades I am indebted to Victoria Wohl; cf. Love among the Ruins, ch.3.
93 Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, p.166
94 In the course of purifying the feverish city, the interlocutors in the Republic agree to banish the flute and flute-players (Plato, Republic, 399d).
day by day, gratifying the desire that occurs to him, at one time drinking and listening to the flute, at another downing water and reducing; now practicing gymnastic, and again idling and neglecting everything; and sometimes spending his time as though he were occupied with philosophy. Often he engages in politics and, jumping up, says and does whatever chances to come to him….

The salient trait of the democratic soul is, of course, its capacity to entertain multiple desires on an equal footing, continually de- and re-territorializing them upon a variety of different pursuits; a democratic soul would therefore seem open to an unusually wide range of individuations, and would seem especially well-endowed with the freedom we earlier attributed to the position of beloved. In the case of the democrat, however, this freedom might be a double-edged sword. For better or worse this soul cannot settle upon a single line of individuation; refusing to surrender any of its possible worlds, it leaps from line to line. And perhaps this is because its lack of education leaves it unable to fully understand or even recognize the many threads of desire that move it. In a sense, therefore, its freedom is vacuous, because it lacks the resources to make a meaningful choice.

Left to his own devices, an individual of this kind seems to make for a charming and harmless—albeit rather useless—citizen. Nevertheless, one suspects that an education that forced such a soul to evaluate its desires and select from among them could produce dramatic results. The democratic soul’s malleability makes it a better candidate for philosophy than the timocratic or oligarchic types, which have little room for anything apart from the single desire that dominates them. Yet this same trait also poses a great danger, for there can be no guarantee that the desire selected will not turn out to be a “stinging drone” or tyrannical eros.

The portrait of Alcibiades we find in the surviving sources is that of a kind of limit-case

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95 Plato, Republic 561c-d.
96 Socrates describes the democrat in terms that, while clearly critical when measured against the standard of the highest type, are nevertheless less derogatory than those characterizing the oligarch, an ostensibly “higher” type; cf. Allan Bloom, “Interpretive Essay” in The Republic of Plato, translated by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), pp.421-422, for a discussion of the tensions responsible for this apparent discrepancy.
of democratic license. We know from Thucydides that the young man was regarded as
paranomos, “beyond the normal”\(^ {97}\) (and beyond the city's nomoi), not just in the extravagance of
his lifestyle,\(^ {98}\) but in the (real or imagined) acts of hubris commonly attributed to him. Yet
beyond the excesses and nonchalant attitude toward propriety one might expect of any wealthy
playboy, Alcibiades seems to have challenged the nomoi on a more basic level. A society
produces its citizens by subjecting them to a series of exclusive disjunctions: are you a human
being, or a beast? Adult or child? Greek or Barbarian? Man or woman? Erastes or eromenos? Let
an adult male Athenian play the politician today, the philosopher tomorrow, and the drunkard on
Friday nights—this is after all nothing to worry about, provided he does not think of becoming a
lion, a child, a woman, or a Persian. Wohl suggests, and I am strongly inclined to agree, that
what the Athenians found so maddening and enticing about Alcibiades was his refusal of such
exclusive disjunctions, examples of which abound in the sources. A grown man, he lisped like a
child; as the eromenos of Socrates, he took the active role proper to the erastes; a general of the
Athenian democracy, he lived in a luxurious manner more closely associated with foreign
despots. Plutarch recounts a fascinating anecdote from Alcibiades' childhood:

> He was once hard pressed in wrestling, and to save himself from getting a fall, set
his teeth in his opponent's arms, where they clutched him, and was like to have
bitten through them. His adversary, letting go his hold, cried: “You bite,
Alcibiades, as women do!” “Not I,” said Alcibiades, “but as lions do.”\(^ {99}\)

Is Alcibiades a girl, or a lion—or both? Wohl sees in his performance at Olympia a nice
encapsulation of his position in the city: “At Olympia Alcibiades took first, second, and fourth
place in the chariot races. So, too, throughout his life he occupied all possible positions—

\(^ {98}\) Thucydides remarks that “his enthusiasm for horse-breeding and other extravagances went beyond what his
fortune could supply” (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, 6.15).
Press, 1916), 2.2.
legitimate and illegitimate—at once.”

Inasmuch as he successfully resists subjection to the exclusive disjunctions imposed by the nomoi, Alcibiades would seem to be endowed with a freedom surpassing that of the average beloved. We wonder at him even across the millennia, as we wonder at anyone who seems to have eluded the either/or's by which we feel ourselves bound. At the risk of hyperbole, we might say that there is something almost god-like in this embrace or integration of apparently incompossible lines of development. And yet matters are not so simple; for, as we saw above, the freedom proper to the eromenos was supposed to be a freedom from eros. In the case of Alcibiades, however, it is not indifference but desire, namely his “love of rivalry” (philoneikon) and “love of preeminence” (philoproton) that leads him across nomic thresholds. As a boy, he becomes a girl (or lion) to win the wrestling match, just as he will become a lover to gain access to Socratic wisdom. If Alcibiades is remotely “god-like” in this respect, the gods in whose nature he partakes are those of the Homeric tradition, changing shape, like Zeus, to woo a woman or, like Proteus, to escape capture—figures as subject to eros as are the humblest of mortals. But (as we have seen) eros only sometimes, or ambiguously, differentiates itself from ananke: the license of the traditional gods (and that of Alcibiades) remains coupled to a servitude perhaps no less painful than that imposed by human nomoi.

What happens, then, when Alcibiades the paranomos meets Socrates the atopotatos? Let us suppose that Socrates teaches the young Alcibiades to recognize these flows of desire traversing his psyche, and to view their unchecked state as a form of slavery, rather than liberty; he even teaches the young man to feel shame at his slavish condition, and to recognize in philosophical education a potential path to freedom. But as we well know, the process of Socratic

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100 Wohl, Love among the Ruins, p.130.
101 Plutarch, Alcibiades, 2.1.
102 Cf. pp.45-46 and 97-98 above.
education proves ultimately unsuccessful; Alcibiades does not become a philosopher, because he cannot keep from reterritorializing his desire on the polis. His soul is thus still in a state of slavishness as he grows to love Socrates; the flow of freedom from the latter cannot save him from this condition, any more than the flow of Socrates’ psychic beauty can beautify Alcibiades’ own soul. Small wonder, then, that he experiences as a form of enslavement his eros for Socrates—slavery is perhaps the only regime of desire he has ever known.

This is not the whole story, however; for Alcibiades’ enslavement to Socrates is coupled with a line of flight. He recounts his distracted wanderings in the early days of his erotic obsession, echoing both Diotima’s account of Eros as nomadic and the description of the lover’s soul in the palinode.103 But this wandering eventually gives way to a desperate attempt to escape Socrates’ pull. In the end, it is Alcibiades who abandons Socrates. Why? As Deleuze-Guattari might say, Socrates travels at absolute speed while remaining motionless.104 Accustomed only to the relative speeds of political life, Alcibiades could see in the philosopher’s condition only an intolerable immobility antithetical to political life, and for that reason “stopped [his] ears and took off in flight, as if from the Sirens, in order that [he] might not sit here in idleness and grow old beside him.”105 Alcibiades had thus begun his exile years before the Sicilian expedition, and he would remain in transit for the rest of his life, more or less, from Athens to Sparta to Persia to Athens to Persia again (he was still moving, en route to the Persian court, at the time of his assassination).

103 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 251d-e: The soul “is perplexed and troubled.... In its agony, it cannot sleep at night nor stay in one place during the day. Filled with longing, it runs wherever it thinks it might see the one who possesses beauty.”

104 We are given two examples of this in the *Symposium* alone: at the beginning, when he lingers on the neighbor’s porch before entering (175a-d); and in Alcibiades’ account of Potidaea, in which Socrates is said once to have stood motionless for twenty-four hours (220c-d). We might also cite his obstinate refusal to go into exile, even to save his own life.

The example of Alcibiades bears out our earlier assertion that, much like individuation and eros itself, lines of flight as such are intrinsically neither positive nor negative. They carry with them the danger of a wild deterritorialization that tears the lover from his niche in the strata only to send him spinning toward his destruction. The deterritorializing effects of Socrates’ erotic program upon the young Alcibiades were arguably of such a kind, bringing about a dangerous mutation in the latter’s political desires. Bloom suggests that Alcibiades’ engagement with Socrates might have “liberate[d him]…from loyalty to the city” making possible his defection to Sparta. The suspension of the force of conventional values so necessary to philosophical individuation can prove disastrous in the sphere of politics. More basically, exposure to Socratic education does seem to have given Alcibiades greater insight into his own desire and to have prompted him to attempt to select a single territory for it, to privilege a single line of individuation. Bloom reminds us of the passage in Alcibiades I in which Socrates “elicits from Alcibiades that he would like to rule over all men”—the question for us is whether and to what extent the boy was “conscious of the extent of his desires beforehand”. If Bloom’s suggestions are right, Socrates’ erotic program simultaneously enabled the violent reterritorialization of his protégé’s desire upon the political, while freeing him from the ethical norms—the conventional “coding” of such desire, as it were—that might have moderated his subsequent reckless behavior.

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107 On the other hand, coupled with Alcibiades' protean nature—or, at the very least, with his capacity to play to whatever audience presented itself—such liberty served him well when it came to ingratiating himself to new assemblages: following Plutarch's account, Wohl reminds us that Alcibiades' “adoption of Spartanness is so alluring to the Spartans that he is even able to insinuate himself into their royal line. Likewise, in Persia Tissaphernes is so beguiled by Alcibiades's kharis that he names his garden resort after him, something Persian potentates usually do for their wives” (Wohl, Love among the Ruins, p.135). We might surmise that his very detachment from the nomoi—that is, his inability to live them either as essential or as simply given—allowed him to “play” the Athenian, the Spartan, or the Persian more alluringly than anyone who was “truly” an Athenian, a Spartan, or a Persian.
Going further, we might see both in Alcibiades’ relationship to Socrates and in his political career traces of a major risk associated with deterritorialization, namely, what Deleuze-Guattari call “the great Disgust, the longing to kill and to die, the Passion for abolition”\textsuperscript{109}. Nussbaum reads the defacing of the herms as precisely such a gesture of abolition: whereas the “sentimentalized lover of Greek erotic paintings greets the boy by affectionately touching him on the face and genitals,” Alcibiades is known for his “violent smashing of holy faces and genitals”\textsuperscript{110}. Yet practically on the eve of this gesture, in his drunken praise of Socrates, he had compared the latter’s soul to certain statues—the silenoi—and spoken of “the injustice of rubbing out, or defacing, Socratic virtues”\textsuperscript{111}—while admitting that “many is the time when [he] should see with pleasure that [Socrates] is not among human beings”.\textsuperscript{112} Alcibiades’ erotic slavery—the inexorable rhythm of his attraction to Socratic logos, his betrayal of its principles, his flight into the arms of the demos, his seduction anew by the flute of Marsyas—constitutes a destructively deterritorializing madness, a line of abolition.

The case of Alcibiades also has implications for the relationship between eros and the polis. In the erotic programs proposed in the Symposium and the Phaedrus Socrates deterritorializes pederastic eros from its customary function in the polis, namely, the production of warrior-citizens; particularly in the latter dialogue the lovers appear to withdraw from the polis to become cosmic citizens. In the figure of Alcibiades, however, the neglected polis—the Athenian assemblage—has its revenge, and eros reverts to its political function, no longer as a

\textsuperscript{109} Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p.227/278.
\textsuperscript{110} Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, p.196. (Is it merely coincidence that Plato makes Phaedrus—who was also implicated in the attack upon the herms, who also went into exile—Socrates’ interlocutor in the other major dialogue on eros?)
\textsuperscript{111} Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, p.166.
\textsuperscript{112} Plato, Symposium, 216c.
means of civic production but as the direct eroticization of politics and war. This transformation is encapsulated by Alcibiades’ golden shield which, as Plutarch tells us, “was emblazoned not with any ancestral device, but with the figure of Eros armed with a thunderbolt.” Or, as Bloom puts it, “Alcibiades was capable of making politics erotic. He made the citizens yearn erotically for Sicily—to their subsequent sorrow.

Much has been written concerning the question of whether and to what extent Socrates “corrupted” Alcibiades; I will not rehearse these arguments here. The interest of Alcibiades for us lies in his status as a very singular product of Socratic erotic individuation: namely, as the paradigm case of its alleged failure to produce worthy citizens. What the fictional man’s speech and the historical man’s deeds underline for us is the unpredictability, in practice, of the erotic programs we have analyzed. Not even a Socratic insight grants complete control over the flows of desire and the individuations they provoke. This is hardly an earth-shattering conclusion, but it should give us pause when evaluating any proposal to systematically harness erotic flows. Eros raises wings upon a lover’s soul, but the line of flight is never guaranteed to be a positive one. And it is Plato himself—another product of Socratic-erotic individuation, but one who followed a very different line—who reveals through Alcibiades the limitations of this type of asymmetrically erotic individuating system, at least within the context of the assemblage in which it originated.

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113 This is, perhaps, an oversimplification; the field of politics was never without its direct and indirect libidinal investments on the part of the demos and its demagogues. Nor was Socrates the only person who found this worrisome and attempted to envision a new, “purer” relationship between eros and politics. (Wohl argues throughout Love among the Ruins that this concern was widespread; she finds especially strong articulations of the problem in Thucydides and Aristophanes.) Yet given the classical tendency to view political and rhetorical relationships according to the model of pederasty, and given Socrates’ attempt, especially in the Phaedrus, not only to modify the pederastic relationship but also to draw it away from the sphere of political production, the fact that Alcibiades would be especially “eroticized” as a political figure seems significant.

114 Plutarch, Alcibiades, 16, quoted in Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, p.165.


V. Conclusion: Love, Desire, Eros

In the first chapter of our investigation, we took care to distinguish love from desire. Whereas desire was simply another name for the intensities circulating within necessary nature, and therefore one of the original material-energetic components of the system, love proved to be an emergent phenomenon operating at a higher level of systemic complexity. Whereas desire in some cases corresponded entirely with necessity, love appeared as a possible solution to the problem of freedom. Ontological love made possible both the virtual communications of the potencies, and the passage between virtuality and actuality; in the latter case, it even gave rise to systemic changes that subsequently tended to exclude it. Otherwise stated, love turned out to embrace all possibilities, including that of its own impossibility.

Could we point to a corresponding love/desire distinction within the experience of eros described above? Perhaps; I would argue, however, that there are at least three reasons why we should hesitate to do so.

The first objection is simply that importing this terminology back into the dialogues would involve imposing divisions that almost certainly would have been foreign both to conventional and Socratic pederastic eros. Schelling's own terminology gives us license to articulate this distinction with regard to his text, but Plato's does not. And we cannot assume that this is “merely” a matter of terminology, that there is some underlying universal experience at stake: the way we experience anything at all is unavoidably conditioned and mediated by the way we talk about it, and vice-versa. If we want to get a sense of what was distinctive about the erotic experience of the classical Athenian assemblage, we need to take seriously the way in which the assemblage itself expressed its eros, and not be too quick to assume that our own
terminology would serve as well, if not better, to describe what “actually” happened.

In the second place, the way in which we moderns conventionally speak of “love” and “desire” in a specifically *erotic* context itself fails to map neatly onto the usage of these terms in our reading of Schelling. Our everyday usage typically presupposes a dualist ontology of body and soul: the body desires other bodies, while the soul loves other souls. (This is already, as anyone will recognize, a gross oversimplification: what lover has not experienced profound bodily tenderness, or savage psychic lust, for his or her beloved? Nevertheless, in our ready-to-hand erotic ontology, we tend to treat these latter experiences as subtle—even perverse—complications of the basic underlying dualism.) Our prescriptive and descriptive statements, if not always our actions, seem to presuppose two basic premises: First, that love in its purest state is minimally dependent upon the body (including both bodily beauty and the vagaries of physical desire—“Of course I'll still love you when you're old and grey!” says the ardent young fiancé); and secondly, that sex in its purest state is a physiological function, having nothing to do with the soul or with love (“Why can't we just have sex? Why do emotions have to be involved?” complains the libertine). To these premises is often added a third, namely, that love is to be valued more highly than (merely sexual) desire.\(^\text{117}\)

The language of *eros* disturbs us, I think, because it does not permit us to assess the “purity” of the lover’s passion for his beloved boy. The heartless seducer and the faithful philosopher-pederast each can claim, without equivocation, to experience *eros* for the object of his attentions. And this is largely because desire—even the sort of desire most closely associated with bodily needs—is, for Plato, a phenomenon indigenous to psychic terrain. As such, it directly challenges the sort of mind-body dualisms we are likeliest to bring to the table in our discussions.

\(^{117}\) I will not attempt here to offer a genealogy of these premises, although their connection with the long history of the mistrust and devalorization of the body in Western thought and religion is clear enough.
of love. (In the *Phaedrus* the lustful dark steed urging immediate physical consummation is as much a part of the soul as both his better behaved counterpart and the charioteer; nor, in the *Symposium*, does the desire to conceive and give birth to beautiful speeches differ in kind from the biological imperative toward sexual reproduction.)

Do we wish to replace our contemporary, everyday erotic ontology with the one I have sketched out above? Not necessarily; the concept and practices of *eros* articulated in the dialogues arise, as I have argued in the Introduction and throughout, in response to the singular topology of the assemblage in which Socrates, Plato, and the other parties involved found themselves. What we need is something that works in *our* assemblages; nostalgia for the ancients will not help us, and is itself a trap for desire.\(^\text{118}\) If we believe, however (as I do) that the dualism implied in our everyday love/desire distinction is problematic both for theory and practice,\(^\text{119}\) then we can take the challenge posed by this word *eros* as a starting point to discover or create more helpful ways of talking about the erotic experiences indigenous to *our* world.

To summarize our second objection: At best, forcing the love/desire distinction upon *eros* risks introducing unnecessary confusion (since it will always be tempting to hear and interpret these terms in the conventional sense). At worst, it resolves too quickly the challenge to rethink our own preconceptions of the phenomena at stake.

The third objection stems from the second. Let us imagine what a generous reading of contemporary usage might look like. We might be tempted to see in the persistence of the contemporary love/desire dualism an impulse to distinguish practically between types of erotic experience that are “good” for us (those that contribute to the lines of individuation we valorize)

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\(^{118}\) The misadventures of the Baron de Charlus in *À la recherche du temps perdu* demonstrate the potential for disaster inherent in the attempt to import erotic practices (such as pedagogical pederasty) indigenous to one assemblage into another to which they are largely foreign.

\(^{119}\) Keeping in mind that the theory/practice distinction itself tends to disintegrate in erotic matters even more rapidly than is elsewhere the case.
and those that are not, or those the value of which remains undecided. While accepting that bodily and psychic phenomenon are even less easily sorted out in erotic experience than elsewhere, and while rejecting the mistrustful attitude toward the body that informs this dualism, we nevertheless might wish to try to reserve the term “love” for those erotic experiences we find most valuable, whilst retaining a second, broader category—desire-without-love—for more ambiguous cases.

Such a stance does not seem unreasonable, nor the impulse behind it unsympathetic. I would argue, however, that it is ultimately impracticable, for reasons intrinsic to erotic experience and systems themselves. To understand how and why this is the case, let us consider a distinction that does surface in the dialogues, namely, that between a “noble” and a “base” eros. (This distinction seems at least roughly akin to the one that our hypothetical generous reader of contemporary usage would like to maintain.) In the dialogues, this distinction refers not to the affect experienced by the lover, but to his comportment in his relationship with the beloved; this comportment, in turn, would seem to depend less upon the quality or strength of the lover's affect than upon other cognitive capacities such as depth of insight (not to mention a degree of self-control). If we compare the lover's treatment of the beloved described in the palinode to that described in Diotima's speech, we may hypothesize that a stance of ethical responsibility toward the beloved is closely bound up with epistemological questions: the better our grasp of the erotic system as a whole, the likelier we are to succeed in cultivating our beloved's possibilities (and our own). The philosophical lover is superior to his less reflective rivals because he has a fuller perspective upon the erotic system, including its virtual and cosmic components.

The problem is that there may be no criterion immanent to erotic experience that would suffice to determine the adequacy of the knowledge we have about the system. Not only is the
relationship between erotic signs and our interpretation of them underdetermined, making possible multiple (better or worse) interpretations, but the evolution of the erotic system depends largely upon our acts of interpretation, so that a deeply flawed or limited line of interpretation will not necessarily encounter corrective resistance from the signs themselves. Not for nothing was eros classified as a form of madness: when eros infiltrates our field of thought, how can we trust the “meta-judgment” we would make about the trustworthiness of our erotic judgments? Values get fuzzy on the field of love, and for the lover, this field is coextensive with life itself. Outside of the idealized myth of the palinode, however—in which the lover behaved as though he were already aware of the metaphysical background given to us by Socrates-Stesichorus—there would seem to be no guarantee of such knowledge. The lover in the palinode succeeds in his interpretive task, he “gets it right”, but this does not give us a surefire method with which we could get it right, in any concrete situation.120

The problem is compounded by the fact that, according to the myth, our soul has at least three voices, and we can never be absolutely certain which of them is speaking at any given point. Reason is not the province of the charioteer alone, nor is force reserved for his horses; the unruly horse argues quite cunningly, and the charioteer must resort to brute force in order to keep him in check.121 When selfishness, cowardice, and even ignorance can speak persuasively, how can we trust even (what appear to be) our best intentions? Under the circumstances, therefore, it's not surprising that (as we learn from the Symposium) the distinction between noble and base eros is exceedingly difficult to maintain, and all but useless as a criterion for determining at the outset whether or not to pursue a given relationship. Eros produces an unpredictable set of effects and affects; as the case of Alcibiades has shown, our best intentions do not suffice to tame this wild

120 It is arguable that the case of Alcibiades provides evidence that Socrates himself could “get it wrong”.
flow, to restrict it to the channels dictated by prudential and ethical concerns—especially if virtue is something we discover in the course of the relationship. Might it be the case, then, that we only come to know the worth of an erotic relationship once the full range of its effects have become evident—that is, once it is over?

This is the perspective taken by the non-lover of Lysias's speech, who focuses upon the situation of the boy after the end of a hypothetical love-affair, and points out that this affair does not hold up so well in the clarity of hindsight. It's tempting simply to attribute this to the non-lover's own jaundiced (and self-interested) viewpoint, or to the real problems with the relationship he describes. But I think that hindsight itself cannot help but play a distorting role here. This is because the most important effect of eros (if we are to believe Socrates-Stesichorus) is the becoming-winged of the soul; and, as I have argued, becoming-winged is immanent to the experience of eros. This implies, however, that such becoming-winged might be invisible from the perspective of hindsight; we do not feel the delicious irritation of sprouting feathers except when the feathers are actively sprouting, that is, when we love. My recollections of former loves are faint and hollow unless I consent, for a moment, to love them again; simply to remember that I loved them is not sufficient. To abstract from the actual workings of eros—as we often do, in hindsight—is to blind ourselves to much of what goes on in an erotic system. Contrary to what we suggested above, the best perspective upon the system would therefore seem to be situated within that system, and the lover's account of his own experience, distorted and partial as it may be, would trump that of the detached onlooker.

Yet there is a further problem with the lover’s perspective. We must not forget the constant refrain of the non- and concealed lovers' speeches: the lover's madness is temporary, but he acts as though it were not. Which is to say that an erotic system contains at least one built-in
blind spot, namely, that *eros* cannot imagine its own cessation or the future dissolution of the erotic system. In other words, the knowledge generated within the system does not include real living awareness of that system’s finitude. Is this misunderstanding (in which consists much of the lover’s “madness”), coupled with the concerns noted above, not sufficiently grave to render any intra-systemic perspective distorted beyond repair?

Perhaps. But I would like to argue that what looks like confusion or distortion afflicting the lover's perspective actually does justice to the way in which real erotic systems work. We encounter our desire in a state of mixture and impurity, we cannot separate the base from the noble, the simple from the complex, the enduring from the transitory, the deep structure from the surface effect. (Or, to put it in Schellingian terms, we do not experience “love” except as commingled with the movement of “being”, of the ongoing constitution of our selves, for that is the condition of its appearance in actuality.) And it’s not just a matter of our limited perspective, because the evolution of the system depends upon its own self-understanding and our understanding of it: at a certain point perspectival ambiguity becomes indistinguishable from an ambiguity inherent to the system itself.

To return to the distinction suggested by the “generous reader”, it's improbable that we would often be able to say rigorously, with certainty and without equivocation—even in retrospect—which of our affairs ought to be dignified with the term “love”; nor are we in any position to draw this distinction with respect to the affairs of others.

Which is not to deny the power or value of the term “love” as it functions in

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122 One might protest that anyone with previous erotic experience would bring to his current relationship the certainty that this relationship has the potential to implode or simply exhaust itself; in other words, memory could supply to the lover what present experience does not. I would reply that this sober certainty based in memory seldom has the force to withstand full-blown *eros*’ conviction of its own permanence. The problem with (or the virtue of) the lover’s madness is that it dissolves the standards against which the lover might measure and correct his madness.
contemporary erotic (or political, or aesthetics, or...) systems. I wish simply to suggest that it is of limited use as a theoretical term if our chief concern is to distinguish theoretically between types or degrees of erotic experience; and, more importantly, that any such theoretical classifications, as well as the practical prescriptions to which they tend to give rise, will be inexorably undermined from within by the nature of that which we are attempting to classify, and by our relation to it. Schelling constructed something like a god's-eye view of the divine system, or as close to a god's eye view as could be envisaged by a finite being. But we are not gods, and we cannot hope to attain such a comprehensive insight into our own erotic individuations. The word *eros* remains useful for describing human erotic experience because its ambiguity reminds us that we lack such insight, that our perspective upon the systems that concern us intimately is limited because we are always either too much in love, or not enough.
CONCLUSION: FROM ONTOLOGICAL LOVE TO FRIENDSHIP

I would like to conclude this investigation with a summary of sorts—not a summary of the argument itself (which can be found in the introduction), but of what I take to be the most important and interesting conclusions we have reached, as well as the questions that have been clarified or generated by these conclusions.

A primary aim of my project has been to demonstrate the value of a particular approach to philosophical questioning. First, I have tried to show that the phenomena described in Schelling's *Ages of the World* and Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* make sense when redescribed in terms of Simondon's theory of individuation; I have also highlighted the ways in which these texts bear out Simondon's claim concerning structural and functional isomorphisms across very different types of system. Secondly, my extensive use of concepts central to the work of Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari has, I hope, made clear that these concepts can be brought into productive and constructive connections with other thinkers, including those toward whom Deleuze is often read as being most adversarial. Throughout the book, I have tried to allow the divergent perspectives, concepts, and questions of these thinkers to function as a conceptual or textual system of individuation, showing where points of connection or communication take shape and generate possible solutions to some of the questions circulating within this system.

Where do we now stand with respect to those questions? I had hoped to construct a concept of impersonal and a-subjective love; initially, it seemed possible to define love as first and foremost a movement of the production of reality as such. Schelling's text held out the hope of conceiving love in precisely this way. In my retelling of Schelling's narrative I showed the way in which love emerges when the system of divine nature achieves sufficient complexity, and,
in particular, when desire becomes uncoupled from necessity and reorients itself toward freedom. Love as an ontological event seems to be contemporaneous with and closely connected to the emergence of a dimension of virtuality; the moment of its appearance precedes the actualization of the universe, and certainly that of any fully-fledged subjectivity, be it divine or human. Indeed, we suggested that the very movement of actualization, the passage into being, might be characterized as a love-event. Yet the orientation of Schelling's narrative toward a horizon constituted by the projected emergence of divine subjectivity raised some concerns. In adopting a concept of ontological love derived from such a source, would we not run the risk of importing a kind of spectral proto-subjectivity into our thought, a hidden attractor that would undermine from the start any attempt to think love a-subjectively?

Ultimately, I feel that this risk is not enough to warrant decisively abandoning the concept of ontological love, in either its present form or other possible versions. Although I remain ambivalently disposed toward this concept, I believe that it might be possible, with great care, to make use of it in ways that would not simply presuppose the existence of the subject at every level of being, and that would on the contrary help us to remember and recover the impersonal aspect of our most personal experiences. We ought, however, to be critical of the uses to which we would put such a concept, taking care to draw the distinction, if not between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” uses, at least between healthy and pathological ones. Is it helpful or healthy for us to talk about ontological love, to look for it and assume it as a factor in our experiences of the world—to revel in the way in which our human loves appear to recapitulate or enact, on a larger and yet more finite scale, the basic mechanisms of the production of reality? Does the affirmation of ontological love help us to find a motivation and a place for our own caring attentiveness toward individuals (and individuating systems) of all kinds, including those
seemingly indifferent or inimical to our own interests? Or do we use the concept of ontological love as an excuse to overlook, to justify, or, worst of all, to glorify instances of genuine suffering, hatred, and cruelty in the world? The responsible use of a discourse of ontological love would require that we be willing to ask these questions.

My second attempt to think love beyond subjectivity took up the question of human erotic experience. As I indicated in the Introduction, falling in (or out of) love, however simple it may seem in practice, is a theoretically complicated matter; it cannot help but mobilize any number of discourses, gestures, material and economic flows, and trans-personal interests, each of which carries an extensive amount of historical sedimentation. In particular, when dealing with accepted norms for erotic behavior (norms of which there is seldom a shortage, even in a sexually “liberated” society) we must remember that the norm in question (be it the traditional expectation of chastity or monogamy, or the more recent imperative in some circles to sexual experimentation and enjoyment) in all likelihood emanates not from transcendent moral constants or universal “facts” of nature and human nature, but rather from specific, contingent mechanisms immanent to a given social assemblage, mechanisms that need to be thoroughly questioned and tested before they can be affirmed or rejected as good or bad—and good for whom? good for what, to which ends? It is therefore of no slight interest for us to undertake a genealogy of the elements of erotic experience.

Knowing that a comprehensive account of all the major elements in contemporary Western love-culture was unfeasible, I took on a far more modest task: to examine the content of an ancient, but still highly influential group of erotic discourses in relation to the conditions of their production. This meant not only setting Platonic-Socratic erotics into the context of traditional ancient pederastic practices, but also explaining how the latter emerged as a singularly
fruitful “problem” from the point of view of the ancient Athenian assemblage. Taking traditional pederasty as a mode of political production, I could then show how the dialogues' variations on tradition deterritorialized desire from its former vocation of political and biological (re)productivity, liberating it for new forms of production and opening the door to novel individuations of many kinds. Two theoretical innovations in the Phaedrus seemed especially promising. First, the myth of the circulation of winged souls situates erotic desire in the context of an infinitely vast and largely mysterious economy of flows, thereby depersonalizing desire and opening up the loving couple to the cosmos. Second, the palinode takes seriously the idea that eros has intrinsic value insofar as it causes the circulation of intensities (the growth of wings) upon the surface of the soul, and attunes the lover to the virtuality inherent in every actuality; this description of desire as a positive flow offers a welcome alternative to the common conception of desire as a negativity or lack oriented toward its own cessation in pleasure.

The dialogues also proved revelatory with respect to the epistemology and language of eros. The Phaedrus’ description of erotic desire in terms of mania indicates the epistemological challenges peculiar to erotic experience, while the persistent difficulty of the Symposium’s interlocutors in distinguishing between “base” and “noble” eros demonstrates the corresponding impossibility of exhaustively evaluating such experience. The appearance and speech of Alcibiades in the latter dialogue, moreover, serves as a practical illustration of just how unpredictable erotic individuation can be, and marks the limits of our best attempts to master the flows of eros. Finally, and most generally, the way in which the Platonic-Socratic discourse(s) of eros are given only in, and as, a plurality of discourses suggests the resistance of eros to any totalizing discourse, modeling instead the gathering of fragments into a working philosophical assemblage.
Given the very selective and historically specific nature of this inquiry, what (if anything) does it have to offer to contemporary philosophical conversations about love—aside from contributing some historical background? First of all, I hope to have shown that approaching human erotic relationships as individuating systems is a viable strategy for understanding what is going on in these relationships. A narrative of the individuating system as guided in its productions by one or more constitutive problems is helpful if we want to grasp how and why erotic relationships—those of the ancient Greeks, but also our own—take the somewhat (usually frustratingly, rather than helpfully) predictable forms they do. If we can seek out the intensive disparities within a system, and follow the connections to their ongoing solutions in extensity, we might have a better chance of understanding why our desire desires what it does, and of imagining or creating other options.

The focus on individuating systems also reminds us that the affects, gestures, and discourse circulating within a relationship always open it upon the assemblage as a whole. There is no wholly “private” form of erotic production, and this requires that we ask sometimes uncomfortable, but important, critical questions about the types of production and (re)production at issue in our relationships, and about the economies in which we are thereby implicated. (For example: to what extent does this erotic system produce or reproduce a power differential between its participants? Does it reproduce sexist and heterosexist assumptions about gender roles or the division of labor? Does it reproduce some disavowed and pathological obsession, some trauma, on the part of its participants? Does it ultimately exist for the sake of producing docile subjects for a capitalist industrial-military complex? And so forth.)¹

Lastly, I believe that my analysis helps to lay the groundwork for further interrogation,

¹ In emphasizing the importance and relevance of these questions, I am of course following the path laid out by Deleuze-Guattari in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia.*
not so much of Platonic-Socratic erotics in the original Greek context,\(^2\) as of the seductive force these texts continue to exert upon us (where “us” includes a fairly large group of contemporary readers: philosophers, classicists, historians, rhetoricians, laypeople....). It would be wise for us to think about the precise nature of this seduction, and about what is at stake for us in answering or resisting its call. The *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* extend to the reader an all-but-irresistible invitation to love—or, more precisely, to assume or identify with the position of lover as it has been articulated by Socrates and his surrogates. Before we affirm this identification (perhaps going so far as to use Socratic erotics as a model for understanding our own relationships), we need, as I said above, to be aware of the connections between the elements and strategies of Socratic erotics and the specific problems and resources of the milieu that gave rise to this way of loving. More pointedly, we need to take seriously the possibility that even the most ostensibly enlightened and beneficial aspects of “philosophical” pederasty connect directly to—and perhaps have a propensity to reinstitute or perpetuate—social mechanisms that are very problematic when viewed from a modern perspective.

The dialogues interpellate the reader as a (potential) lover,\(^3\) but the position of lover is far from socially neutral or indeterminate: it is tacitly constructed as that of the adult male citizen, probably a man with leisure enough to pursue the beloved, and sufficient wealth to woo him with gifts (hence a politically enfranchised property owner); probably not a metic or barbarian, certainly not a slave or a woman. To the extent that the modern reader diverges from this ideal of ancient Athenian masculinity, his or her identification with the lover's position will entail some degree of abstraction from these (molar) social markers. Yet even when it apparently succeeds in

\(^2\) A great deal of important work has been done on this question by thinkers such as Irigaray and Nussbaum (to name only two).

\(^3\) For the recognition and formulation of this problem I am indebted to Wohl’s analysis of the Funeral Oration in Thucydides; *cf. Love among the Ruins*, ch.1.
evacuating the lover's position of troublesome social content, this operation of abstraction leaves us with a twofold concern: first, that our desire to occupy with the lover's position is itself in part, a (disavowed) desire to identify—if only on the level of fantasy, via a molecular trickle of yearning—with precisely these other determinants of social status; and second, that the way in which the lover loves, that is, the way he both interprets and enacts his erotic impulses, might be inextricably bound up with and structured by these social factors we have endeavored to eliminate. The problem is compounded when we consider the extent to which the position of philosopher—a position the reader is also presumably encouraged to occupy—is conflated with that of the lover.

I would like to touch upon three aspects of the Socratic philosopher-lover's position that require further interrogation. First, as I mentioned in the Introduction, there is the matter of gender. What, if anything, is distinctively masculine about the erotic and philosophical experiences Plato describes? How does the construction of the lover as male relate to the curious transformations of masculinity we see in the dialogues—for example, the striking appropriation of pregnancy as a model for (male) erotic productivity in the Symposium? To what extent does Socrates' account of eros break from norms of male behavior (and offer us the chance to do the same) and to what extent does it simply reinforce them, writing women out of the picture altogether? Finally, is it possible that the understanding of desire as an optical phenomenon—a theme foregrounded in the Phaedrus—privileges a distinctively masculine experience of eros and of philosophy itself, to the detriment of other possible, equally helpful models of desire? These questions (and others like them) are hardly original, and have been incisively posed by thinkers such as Irigaray; the point is that we need to remember, in the face of the dialogues’ attractive force, that the philosopher-lover’s position is questionable in such a way.
The second troubling aspect of the lover concerns his social asymmetry with regard to the beloved. The erotic relationship praised by the dialogues as a privileged site for positive individuation is defined by a disparity in the social status of its participants. We have discussed in the second chapter the reasons why traditional pederasty needed to construct erotic relationships in such a way (namely, to avoid compromising a citizen's physical and psychic integrity); my concern is that despite the very different assemblage(s) in which we now find ourselves—contexts offering far fewer barriers to erotic relations with a social equal—there continues a tendency to eroticize this type of social difference or power differential, to the point of producing such differentials even when they are not initially imposed by the material circumstances of the participants.\(^4\) We have seen that the flow of *eros* arises from intensive disparities, but there is nothing to suggest that these intensive differences necessarily correspond to extensive (“molar”) factors such as gender, race, occupation, or economic status. This is not to say that the *only* acceptable erotic relationship can be that between social equals; but we need to question whether and to what extent a type of relationship powered by social asymmetry continues to serve, on some level, as a paradigm for our erotic behavior.

The third problem with the position of lover sketched out in the dialogues concerns a different and more insidious form of asymmetry, namely the epistemic superiority and authority of the lover relative to the beloved. Erotic relationships of the type described by Socrates entail a certain attentive care toward individuation. In traditional pederasty, the lover simply took responsibility for the individuation of the beloved; in the refined Socratic variations, although the lover's own individuation is prioritized and the possibility of co-individuation (for example, the

\(^4\) We see this, for instance, in cases of women (or men) who knowingly place themselves in a position of economic dependence and vulnerability in relation to their spouse or partner, even when other options exist; or, more commonly, in situations in which both parties profess to want an equal distribution of household tasks, but one party nevertheless ends up doing most of the work.
production of beautiful speeches, or of a shared way of life) is broached, the lover appears to retain a degree of influence and authority over the beloved's individuations that is not quite reciprocated; that is, although the lover certainly undergoes individuations in response to the beloved, the arbiter of the value of these changes remains the lover himself, not the beloved. Now, in the dialogues this epistemic asymmetry is clearly a function of social asymmetry, which means that it presumably is not necessitated by contemporary erotic contexts. I worry, nevertheless, about the appeal that a pedagogically flavored erotics continues to hold for us. It's not hard to understand the source of this appeal: the lover's position holds out the promise of epistemic authority within the relationship, while conversely, the beloved's position allows the transfer of any serious epistemic responsibility on to the shoulders of the lover. Defenders of pedagogical *eros* will reply that the goal is not to persist in this inequality, but on the contrary to bring about the equality of lover and beloved; but is that becoming-equal not destined to take place mostly on the terms dictated by the lover? Can I ever become truly equal to you if you retain all along the authority to govern and adjudicate my becomings? Without denying the possibility of genuinely loving and beneficial erotic relationships of the “pedagogical” type, I would like to point out that the *privileging* of such a model stands in a relation of significant tension to the widely espoused commitment to full and genuine equality in our erotic relationships.

These concerns with the model of *eros* offered by the dialogues, coupled with the recognition that the *other* models for erotic systems that we have inherited from our tradition are usually no better in this regard, have helped to clarify for me an important direction for future research: namely, an analysis of *friendship* from the point of view of individuation. I believe that the resulting concept of friendship will be able to do at least two things for us that our concept of
eros cannot. First of all, it promises a model of human love that does not on some level presuppose and valorize significant inequalities between the ones who love; nor does it grant one party undue epistemic authority with respect to the system as a whole and the individuations at stake. For this reason, it may be more helpful than existing models of erotic experience when it comes to envisioning liberatory new forms of human relationship. Secondly, the concept of friendship could help us to articulate the nature of our relationships and responsibilities both toward our preindividual milieus and toward “all the others” who find themselves co-implicated within those milieus—that is, toward those indifferent billions of individuals (human and otherwise) with whom we are not and will never be “friends” in the everyday sense of the word.

Let us first touch upon friendship as a way of understanding the relationship between the individual and its milieu, a concept elaborated by Simondon (as we mentioned toward the end of the first chapter). What is given prior to the emergence of subjectivity, prior even to the full formation of the individual, is a relationship of dependence upon a milieu; we find ourselves always already embedded in systems that sustain us and to which we cannot help but contribute. Historically, we\(^5\) have tended to react to the discovery of our dependent condition with fear, denial, and violent attempts at appropriation—in short, according to what we might term a model of defensive or preemptive imperialism. Given that the effects of these reactions become both farther-reaching and more unpredictable when multiple individuating systems are in play (as is increasingly the case), friendship would seem to be an especially helpful alternative model for coming to terms with our relation(s) to our milieu(s). What would it mean for us to consider ourselves on friendly terms with the various interlocking systems in which we come to be? What

\(^5\) This is a problematic “we”; it refers chiefly to individuals existing in social assemblages characterizable as industrialized, capitalist, and “globalizing” (for want of a better term), while freely allowing for the possibility of counter-currents and dissent within such assemblages. The reader is welcome to decide for him- or herself the extent to which he or she is implicated in this “we”.

privileges and obligations—toward other individuals, toward the milieu as a whole—would such friendship afford? And how might a paradigm of friendship alter the ways in which we negotiate the conflicts that inevitably arise? (No friendship, after all, is without its crises...)

With respect to understanding relationships between individuals, the concept of friendship also seems to have much to offer. Again, we have seen hints of its importance in the foregoing analysis. In the second chapter, we discussed Calame's contention that the purpose of ancient pederasty was to prepare the youth for and induct him into relationships of philotes—that is, friendly mutual trust—not only with lover, but with his future spouse and his fellow citizens. This theme continues in the palinode of the Phaedrus, where Socrates-Stesichorus indicates that the erotic relationship between lover and beloved is destined to end in life-long friendship.\(^6\) Naturally, the full elaboration of a concept of friendship will require detailed analysis of the structure and functioning of the distinctively “friendly” individuating system—we will need to determine what rhythms of desire animate such systems, which disparities pose the most productive problems, and so forth—all of which remains to be done. It nevertheless seems permissible, at this point, to posit one meaningful isomorphism between a friendship-system and the erotic systems we have studied. Based upon experience I take to be common, I think it probable that friendship entails—and is perhaps defined by—an attunement to and care for another's virtuality (as well as one's own) on the part of the individuals involved. My friend is one to whom it matters which lines of individuation I select (although, if she is a conscientious friend, she will not attempt to control the process of selection), just as the actualization of her virtual worlds matters to me; she is, moreover, one with whom I can envision projects of co-individuation.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 256d-e.

\(^7\) Based on these criteria, it’s clear that the category of friend overlaps with that of lover (or parent, or mentor).
We need, however, to push our theory of friendship further than a simple translation or recasting of our theory of *eros*. In our foregoing analysis of erotic systems we focused upon a type of individuating system constituted by the problem of relation between the lover and the beloved; to the extent that the relation in question—an interpersonal bond—is at least somewhat voluntary for the parties involved, so is participation in the resultant individuating system(s). This may tempt us to conclude that the most important individuating systems or milieus are the ones we select for ourselves. What's more, it's easy to get the impression that where love is concerned, both the explicit articulation of the system, and the recognition and acceptance of the responsibilities it presents, follows and depends upon some strong affect—erotic desire, personal sympathy, a protective impulse, and so forth. Such conclusions and impressions are very misleading, however: although these types of systems may be the most attractive and compelling, they are not necessarily representative of all the systems in which (human) individuals find themselves engaged. As a matter of fact, our focus thus far has left unthought an entire field of relationships. I am referring here to a far more common form of individuating system, one that typically operates on a larger scale (or simultaneously involves multiple different scales): those non-voluntary, impossibly complex sites of co-individuation—such as an ecosphere, a nation-state, an economic regime—implicating millions or billions of individuals at any given time. How many of our possibilities are selected for us not by a well-meaning lover or friend, but impersonally, perhaps as a side-effect of some other systemic event? And how much more is this (unjustly) the case for some individuals than for others?

The question with which I would like to leave the reader is whether we might take the undeniable fact of our co-implication in wide-ranging individuating systems as the basis for an

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8 Although we certainly encountered systems in which other types of individuation were at stake (for instance, the individuation of literary styles)—these systems were from our point of view somewhat auxiliary to and dependent upon the system comprised of lover and beloved.
equally wide-ranging friendship. How might we cultivate and welcome the event of friendship as a potential emergent feature even of the largest systems? Although I cannot say too much in advance about the form such an anonymous or impersonal friendship might take, I believe it would begin with attentiveness, with the desire or striving to be attentive to the myriad lines of individuation visibly (and invisibly) bound up with one's own, and a willingness to own up to the ways in which our own individuations impact—enhancing or limiting or simply changing—the options available to individuals elsewhere in the system. It might be the case that the most important expression of human love occurs in the form of our friendship with the milieu, and in this openness to friendship with all the other individuals within it. As the relationships between individuals (from the microbe to the transnational corporation) and milieus (from the tidepool to the nation-state) become increasingly fraught, a viable and productive theory of friendship seems ever more desirable (as I am far from the first to recognize); I look forward to participating in the ongoing project of generating such a theory.
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