

ONE STRUCTURE, MANY MODELS*

Antonello Sciacchitano

The faculty of desire is the faculty to be by means of one's representations the cause of the objects of these representations. The faculty of a being to act in accordance with its representations is called life.
Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Anyone may make the observation that, when we take the infinite into consideration, we abandon reality.
Domenico Costantini, *The Historical-Philosophic Foundations of the Statistical-Probabilistic Disciplines*

I begin with an autobiographical consideration. I spent half of my life – the better half – with an artist. My first wife was a painter. Of what kind of paintings? Essentially figurative. She painted representations. At the end of her life she composed large paintings, especially polyptychs, which represented representations, in particular reflections. Her last exhibition was entitled *The City Reflects*, a title offering all of the ambiguity of the Italian verb “riflettere”, which means both to “reflect a ray of light” and “think intensely”. Romana Debeus’ paintings represent the reflections in the windows of skyscrapers of the cities that she loved: Milan, Berlin, New York. The paintings of this series represent representations. In a certain sense – in the Lacanian sense of the term – they are signifiers. They represent the public subject – the city – through other’s signifiers. Considered abstractly, they constitute a very rich series of signifiers: the signifiers of her artistic discourse.

At this point I should speak of repetition compulsion and add that the artist has the ability to establish and highlight the signifiers recurring in the work of civilization. In Romana Debeus’ case, these are the signifiers of the life of the city. But I don’t want to start down that road because it covers ground already understood. Freud already spoke of representers of representations and of the constant return of the identical. As a Freudian, I know this discourse well. I also know the important improvements introduced by Lacan with the mirror stage. But here my scope is different. Today, remembering Romana Debeus in a way that isn’t reduced to rite and the repetition of things already known, I decided to bring something new, knowingly running the risk of saying something silly. So, I’m gathering up my courage and rejecting a calm and scholastic comment based on already acquired knowledge. And I ask myself: what new things ¹⁰⁵ did I learn in all those years with an artist? And I answer: exactly that thing that Kant taught us many years ago with his theory of *Einbildungskraft*. This is the theme I would like to develop. For the artist, *Einbildungskraft* is everything. Hence it is important to respond to the question: where is this *Kraft* and where does it come from? The analyst and the philosopher both have an answer to give. Perhaps that of the

* A reduced version of this paper in German is published in *Von Freud und Lacan aus: Literatur, Medien, Übersetzen. Zur “Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit”*, edited by Tanja Jankowiak, Karl-Joseph Pazzini, Claus-Dieter Rath, Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld 2006, pp. 245-254. This volume gathers the proceedings of a conference, held in Berlin on December 4-5, 2004, organized by the *Freud-Lacan Gesellschaft* and the *Assoziation für die freudsche Psychoanalyse* in memory of Jutta Prasse, a Berlin psychoanalyst who died in May of 2004.

philosopher is clearer and more accessible to a non-specialist public, even if it tends toward tautology. In the first page of his *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant establishes that *Einbildungskraft* is the necessary condition – in its “transcendental” sense – of the ability to desire. There is no *Einbildungskraft* without desire. Unfortunately the condition is not sufficient. At this point Kant abandons the tautological sphere and enters into details. In order to function as a spring for *Einbildungskraft*, the ability to desire must demonstrate that it has the ability to deal with representations. For the issue under discussion I would say that *Einbildungskraft* must have a particular regard for representability, the Freudian *Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit*. The same requirement applies to the artist. An artist must show himself capable with representations. In a certain sense, the artist must demonstrate that she is a technician of representations. The ancient Greeks rightly called art “*techne*”.

But this is still too generic. *Einbildungskraft* becomes a true force only when it manages to produce, thanks to its representations, a new object. The Kantian saying is clear. “The faculty of desire is the faculty to be by means of one’s representations the cause of the objects of these representations”.¹ Kant speaks the old Aristotelean language of cause and effect. By nature prescientific knowledge was etiological. It was based on the principle of sufficient reason, in that it was a knowledge more cognitive than exactly scientific. It aimed to find, through representation, the object that is there, rather than inventing the object that is not. In aesthetic terms, art supplies copies of reality (*mimesis*) or of ideas (*metessi*). Notwithstanding the Cartesian revolution, the cognitive stance arrived all the way to Kant. Lacan suffered the influence of Kant, when he employed his object-cause of desire. This was a mistaken move and one to correct, as the premises of scientific practice had changed. In the first place, in fact, modern science is less oriented toward knowledge of the object than to its construction. Secondly, it depends less on the notion of cause. In theoretical physics treatises there is no talk of causes but of interactions between parts of a system. Being scientific, psychoanalysis’ lot is the same as science’s. In particular it has no need to lean on any foundation that is not linguistic. But I will speak (more) about this later. In modern language, desire produces a model of an object by representing it. This formulation is weak enough to allow various alternatives. Simplifying greatly, there are three modalities of the relationship between representation and object. I like to call the first modality, impossible. An object exists but representation does not. It is impossible to present the object through representations. Kant called the unrepresentable object *noumenos*. Later on we will see that there is no need to devise new names.

The second modality I call nihilistic. Representations exist but the object does not. The entire relationship with the object is dispersed in the game of the myriad of reflections between representations. This modality is typical of the postmodern.

The third modality is the most important for my talk. I call it non categorical. It is so in the sense that there exists no categorical relationship, the classic *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, between object and representation. In fact, there is an object and various non-equivalent representations, which not only fail to conform to the object but also to one another. As a psychoanalyst I permit myself to exclude the postmodern or nihilistic possibility. The analytic experience, in fact, teaches that the object exists, perhaps where we wouldn’t think. It produces effects of desire even when it is unrepresentable. The *Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit* – which I like to translate as “special attention to representability” – consists in joining the two alternatives: on one hand the singularity of non-representability, on the other the multiplicity of the multiple inadequate

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, in Werkausgabe, herausgegeben von Wilhelm Weischedel, Band VIII, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1991, p. 315. (author’s translation)

representations. Between the two alternatives – one ¹⁰⁶ unrepresentability, many representations – there are neither paradoxes nor antimony, but rather the field of psychoanalytic interpretation expands. In Lacanian terms I would speak of the division of the subject. But I don't want to play the Professor of Lacanism.

To make this discourse more concrete I could cite my clinical practice cases but, having begun with references to the artist's work, I'll continue down that road.

The artist has an almost physiological perception of unrepresentability. Moving the paintbrush or spatula on the canvas, he produces representations, but the movement of the brush or the spatula defies representation. The same happens to the child who wants to draw a car. Moving the pencil up and down on the piece of paper in the first place, to take control of the space of representation and, secondly, to represent the car. At the end of the process we find the drawing of the car, which, however, is still. With respect to representability the movement ex-ists, Heidegger would say. It remains outside of the representation, even if it permits it.

Philosophers have always had difficulty conceiving of movement. Zenon's paradoxes demonstrate the strangeness of the concept of movement with respect to the poor Parmenidian ontology, which accounts for only two possibilities, tautological, and therefore poor in content: the being that is and the non-being that is not. The transition from being to being, through non-being, does not exist in ontology. Being remains static in itself. Other than hosting the infinite variability of the forms of being! Accordingly ontology adapts poorly to modern science, which treats the variability of movement and transformations, these being mechanical, biological, or sociological. Within variability objects assume a preontical status: varying, they do not exist categorically. But non-categorability and speed of variation were not notions within the range of classical thought, which was substantially categorical and static.

Aristotle cultivated anthropomorphic ideas on the velocity and acceleration of movement. Movement always had a cause, in fact, more than one. The motor, for example, the arm that throws a lance, was that efficient cause; the target, which the mobile object must reach, the final cause. These etiological representations are useless for science, when they are not actually an obstacle, because they are not abstract enough. Galilean science's long period of incubation caused by the difficulty of finding a good topology of the concept of instantaneous velocity, that is, an abstract velocity (without ontology), because without duration. The essence of the difficulty consisted in the question of the infinite in the form of infinitely little or infinitesimal. It had to do with conceiving of a temporal infinite in the form of temporal intervals that become so little as to not have a measurable duration but that are still real. How is it possible to observe a variation, for example in spatial positioning, if the interval does not last long enough to be recorded? For prescientific thought, which does not possess a topology of approximation, this is contradictory, and therefore cannot be represented. Moving from the temporal to the spatial infinite, things did not improve. The Ancient Greeks did not truly know (did not want to know?) the infinite. For them it was virtually an indeterminate, but not infinite, size. In reality it has to do with a finite size larger than any other measurable finite size, its greater extreme (sup), more ideal than real. The geometry and physics of the Ancient Greeks were, respectively, theory and practice of measurable sizes. That which was not measurable did not exist. (They did not have modern notions of variable nor of function). Aristotle called the increasingly large finite "potential infinite". In actuality only the finite existed. The infinite existed only in potentiality, therefore it did not exist. In classical antiquity the displacement of infinity was complete.

To meet the current infinite, beyond size, we had to wait for the painters of the Renaissance, who invented a non-metrical geometry, that is, without size: a projective

geometry. The gain for mathematics, as well as for aesthetics, was notable. Thanks to the notion of projection the concept of function, understood as an application of a set (for example, a surface or a line) to another (a plane or a curve) found its timid way into mathematics. Projective ¹⁰⁷ representation, in particular perspective, managed to establish the point at infinity in a point on the canvas or on the wall, projecting it through the so-called vanishing point, determined by the convergence of parallel lines. The point at infinity functioned as a pivot around which the painting's representation rotated. It's worth noting that it was a singular point. It is in the center of the representation, where it can be identified through the technique of perspective, but it is not in and of itself a point different from the others. The fact of being a point at infinity does not locate it in another plane, as a transcendent divinity. The authentic infinite, or rather, the lay one, not the religious, is democratic and respectful of the rules that apply to everyone. In truth, perspective – the geometrical theory of spatial representation elaborated by Leon Battista Alberti, Piero della Francesca and Albrecht Dürer – has a special regard for the representation of infinite. It knows how to treat this new and perhaps estranging object with the required modes. It makes room for an object up to now and still mistreated by Western culture, dominated by the criteria of mimesis in aesthetics and of *adaequatio* in metaphysics. Finally, because neither *mimesis* nor *adaequatio* are valid for the infinite.

The infinite is the object of modernity, common to mathematics, art, science and psychoanalysis. The modern man does not think with his own soul, as in Aristotle's time. The modern subject – the subject of science – “thinks with its own object”, Lacan notes.² This is a first difference, subjective. But there is a second, more relevant, objective. Modernity thinks the unthinkable, that is, the infinite. Have we returned, in this way, to metaphysics? No, because the object in question is a special object. In reality, it is not an object. In fact, it is a non-categorical structure – as I have already said – in the sense that it cannot be conceptualized in a concept, but only represented by different non-equivalent models. The infinite does not lend itself to founding either an idealistic metaphysics – the object is not purely rational – nor an empirical practice – the object is not entirely testable. What's more, even if it were an object, it would be a plural object, which escapes every attempt at *reductio ad unum*. In fact, the arithmetical model of the infinite, which is used to count or to play roulette, is not equal to the geometrical model, which is used to draw or measure. Non-categoricity is a frequent phenomenon in mathematics. For example, in the classical calculation of probability, that the flip of a coin will come out “heads” can be given a probability of any of the infinite values in the interval between zero and one, including the extremes, on the condition that the symmetric probability to 1/2 is given to “tails.” In the face of this situation the philosopher decrees: “Science does not think”.³ It's true. Science does not think the reality of being. It thinks different models of the same epistemic structures, which do not inhabit the spaces of ontology (or of the One) but of *Einbildungskraft*.

And psychoanalysis? What does it think, psychoanalysis?

Psychoanalysis thinks the objects of desire. I say “the objects of desire” and not “the object-cause of desire”, as Lacan proposes. In fact, the object is not one, as we have just seen. Moreover, it is illusory to think that a cause of desire exists. It has to do with psychiatric illusions that work with mental illness, supposing that for each one there exists a specific etiology. In truth, that which seems a psychic cause is the effect of the choice that the subject makes between different models of the object within the

² As Lacan says in introducing his object *a*. See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre xi. Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (1964), Seuil, Paris 1973, p. 60.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Was heisst denken?* (1954), Niemeyer, Tübingen 1984.

phantasmatic frame. The phantasm is the location of interaction, often traumatic, between subject and object. Since it is finite, the subject does not manage to grasp the infinite, which remains ultimately and definitively beyond the range of its own awareness. In its relation with the object of desire, the subject has two possibilities: one practical, the other theoretical. In practice, the subject may construct a model of the object. In theory, it may give it a name, as if it were an unknown but not indeterminate size, to construct an algebraic equation upon, as Lacan tried to do, with results that leave much to be desired.

During self-analysis or patient analysis, the analyst empirically tests the phantasmatic relationship between subject and object of desire. There is a vast spectrum of phantasmatic¹⁰⁸ interactions. While being traceable to the interaction between finite and infinite, they are not all equivalent. Each furnishes a model of relation to objects. Let's review some of them.

When the subject experiences the object of desire as a geometrical infinite, we find ourselves in the field of experiences of the gaze, or the scopic. In a passive version the subject desires itself observed by infinite points in space, though not necessarily all. This form of objectual choice is called exhibitionism within a topology where the object is a dense sum of in space. In an active version the subject tries to find, like a needle in a haystack, the exact vanishing point of all representations in a space increasingly closed around a limit point, as through increasingly smaller keyholes. This is called voyeurism.

In the case where an object of desire is the voice, we are dealing with continuous infinite. Through one of the infinite combinations of harmonics, which form that which constitutes its peculiar timbre, the subject is called to be the voice of the Other. Every combination or mixture of frequencies can become a signifier that represents the subject with another signifier, that is, through another combination of mixture of frequencies (de Saussure's acoustic image). This aspect of the objectual relationship was ignored by Freud, who did not recognize the vocal object. (Freud wasn't exactly a musicologist.) Lacan was right in introducing the repetition compulsion⁴ into metapsychology as a fundamental constitutive element of the speaking unconscious. The voice is a "plastic" object. It can change form and pass from the geometric to the numerical infinite. I won't waste time in demonstrating that the two infinities are not equal. In fact, after Cantor, it is known. His diagonal method established that the geometric infinite is more numerous, in a certain sense more infinite than the arithmetical one. Yet here I am not talking about quantity, but quality. So then I will observe that on the level of arithmetical infinity the vocal object of desire presents itself as a musical rhythm or tempo. Freud, who had fine hearing but was deaf to music, spoke philosophically of the eternal return of the identical, misrecognizing that repetition, even when rhythmic, always needs the infinitively different or always new, as Kierkegaard noted in his *Repetition*.

The discrete infinite also exercises its influences on the concrete objects of everyday life, like the breast or shit, through the time – rhythm again – of their appearance and disappearance. The breast appears on the scene of the subject after an infinite wait, perhaps full of tears and screams (the scream is an object). Vice versa shit appears suddenly, but the subject is not capable of foreseeing when and why it will reappear. The time of shit is, in the old sense, indeterminate. It can last longer than every determined limited interval. It can be an object represented by the ancient infinite potential, always larger. It is not surprising that obsessive neurosis, the most "cultural"

⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre xi. Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, Seuil, Paris 1963, p. 164.

of the neuroses, meaning that which most strongly denotes the limits of civilization, above all in the psychastenic variation, has a fundamentally anal constitution. There is also a flipside to this discourse, which justifies the interest in the mathematical approach to the theory of the object of desire. What happens if the object remains or re-becomes finite? Do we regress to classical antiquity, as a certain die-hard humanism would have it? In a certain sense, yes. Perversion is born. The perverse subject, which like every subject is finite (in general, topologically speaking, it is “thin” or “strange”), does not desire the infinite object but takes infinite pleasure in the finite object. Which is now called fetish. The fetish object is well suited to the finite subject, which can now establish a relationship of (near) equality. And Aristotle would agree.

There remains one last “objectual” possibility worth highlighting. It is the tragic one in which the object is neither finite nor infinite, but lost. It is the cause of madness, which does not content itself with the finite object of antiquity, but does not know how to maneuver the infinite object of modernity. Madness is the “absence of work” (*absence d’oeuvre*), as Foucault intuited, with a precision that frightened even him, who censored the chapter on absence of work in his *History of Madness* now published as an appendix. Instead, one must have the courage to say it. Madness is the shadow ¹⁰⁹ that faithfully accompanies every move the scientist or artist makes which concerns itself with infinite. “The shadow of the object falls on the ego” (*der Schatten des Objekts fiel auf das Ich*), which now no longer reflects. Freud’s intuition in *Mourning and Melancholy* still holds, in fact it is clarified in the topology of the infinite. Modern madness is the melancholy of the infinite. At this point it is necessary to signal a certain difficulty. The list of all the models of the infinite, potentially functioning as object of desire, is unthinkable, as Lacan points out,⁵ because all of the representations of the infinite do not make a whole. It is impossible to enumerate all of the models and gather them in a collection, defined by a concept. They can only be talked about as a class of their own. According to von Neumann a proper class is a multiplicity for which there exists no (meta) class to which it belongs. In a philosophical sense a proper class is not a complete and conceptually determined set. In this regard Lacan would speak of not everything.⁶ My opinion is that the mathematical term of proper class is preferable in that it is not negative. The proper class of infinite representations is very large. It is infinite in the Greek sense of indeterminate or without limits. It also contains nothing, the object of anorexia, and the object no longer rediscovered, the object of melancholy. In a certain sense, neither nothing nor the object lost are real objects. They are rather the consequences of the immensity of the representations of the infinite. Which is so immense that in it no object can be found and every object is automatically lost. The infinitude of the representations of the infinite is the authentic “cause” of the ability to desire and of its *Einbildungskraft*. The unconscious is the seat of this “faculty”. If there were no unconscious, desire would remain completely unknown and unexplored. Thanks to the unconscious, almost as if it were a search engine like Google, every once in a while we become aware of something of our desire like a form of the infinite. And

⁵ “Liste impensable, si l’on n’y ajoute avec nous le phonème, le regard, la voix, – le rien). Car ne voit-on pas que le trait: partiel, a juste titre souligné dans les objets, ne s’applique pas a ce qu’ils soient partie d’un objet total qui serait le corps, mais a ce qu’ils ne représentent que partialement la fonction qui les produit”. Jacques Lacan, *Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir dans l’inconscient freudien* (1960), in *Ecrits*, Seuil, Paris 1966, p. 818.

⁶ Perhaps *L’Etourdit* (1972) is the first written text in which Lacan introduces this unfortunate term. “Dire qu’une femme n’est pas toute, c’est ce que le mythe nous indique de ce quelle soit la seule à ce que sa jouissance dépasse, celle qui se fait du coit”. *L’Etourdit*, Scilicet, 4, Seuil, Paris 1973. p. 23.

so it seems so foreign to us that we cannot think of anything better to call it than desire for the other. In the end, the analyst, like the ancient Greek, wants to hear nothing of the infinite. If it weren't for artists...

Translated by Patricia Garborik