ПОИСКИ НОВОГО ЯЗЫКА В ФИЛОСОФИИ

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interviewed by Nina Sosna

ASYMMETRY INSTEAD OF EXTENSION

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N.S.: In Russia, you are famous for the book on the Protocol and the demiphologization of networks regarding their seeming interactivity, redeeming decenteralization, universality and absence of boundaries. How did your views changed since then: on code, deciphering, entchantement and encryption? Does the latter refer to the compression of data that is opposed to the highly political desire of entchantement to the state of transperancy in order to use better and manipulate?

The question seems to acquire strange colors against the background of a statistical increase in the number of those who share the conspiracy theory, not only in Russia (the country has not a simple political multi-issues history of this type of explanation developing over two hundred years), but in the world, doesn't it?

A.G.: Even ten or fifteen years ago I would still have spoken enthusiastically about protocol and the heyday of protocological power. I mean things like horizonality, distributed networks, open source, virality and contagion, multiplicity, the rhizome instead of the tree. In the late 1990s when I first started studying the Internet protocols, they seemed to constitute a newly ascendent form of organization

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and power. My question at the time was not so much: what is sovereign power? Or, what are the determinations within hierarchy? Or, how is the psyche inflected by the superego? These kinds of questions seemed quaint, even old fashioned. My questions were more: can purely rhizomatic organization produce its own kind of sovereignty? Or, what are the pathologies of openness? Or, how is control an extension of discipline?

Still, in the ten or fifteen years since, protocol has lost its leadership position. Contemporary society and culture seems to have slipped backward into the old ways. There are many good things about the Web 2.0 revolution that started in the early 2000s, but it's clear now that this signaled the start of a dramatic backslide into traditional structures of power and organization. Today our infrastructures are more likely to be proprietary rather than protocological, hidden rather than open, vertical rather than horizontal, extractive rather than expressive, centralizing rather than dispersive. As has happened many times before, the great expansion of progressive values in the late 20th Century ended up as mere "research and development" for corporate and state power, which stepped into the shoes we fabricated for it to fill. And what was so thoroughly postmodern has now reverted into a kind of brutal medievalism, a new Dark Age with its accompanying infrastructures of dogma and power.

N.S.: Does it make sense today, in your view, to speak of the local context, that is, of the place where the production of theory might happen, given the problems of media theory in particular and of contemporary philosophy in general? I do not mean "abstract" formulae like "dialectics of local and universal", etc., but am rather interested in you opinion about "place", "space", the possibility to allocate specific "zones" in it? S. Zielinski could be a figure of reference here: he not only wrote a book (*Deep time of the media*, MIT Press, 2006) about the historical and cultural territories which were considered to lose the game of commonwealth to other states some 500–600 years ago, but formulated in later book (*After the media*, 2013), in fact, waving his hand to the 20th century, a need to be located on the edge of the world. Or the writer and literary critic E. Glissant, native of Martinique, who introduced the concept of mondialité stressing that players now come from the periphery, the niches, and the margins of the territories of the world powers: "Those who are gathered here, always come from 'over there,' from faraway, and they have decided to bring their uncertain knowledge, which they acquired There, to Here." Or McKenzie Wark with his idea of "low theory", to which many can contribute, the idea which is so attractive for today's youth. Or representatives of the French theory, who wrote about the minor literature, which is additional (in the Niels Bohr sense) to the mainstream literature and functions as a kind of symptom? In other words, how the question unfolds in terms not so much of globalization, but of decentration? Where does "anti-Web might come from"?

A.G.: One way to think of this is through the concept of *insufficiency*. Philosophers like to talk about the "principle of sufficient reason." But I'm more interested in a principle of insufficient reason, a process by which sufficiency is rendered insufficient. This might resonate with the kinds of things you mention: low theory; precarity and periphery; the finitude of place as opposed to the universality of space. At the same time networks and protocols have taught me to be skeptical of the category of the margin. Networks have mostly done away with margins, tending to include rather than exclude, and issuing much more strict penalties for non-compliance (starvation, incarceration, death). Temporary autonomous zones, subcultures, alternative cultural practices – these techniques of "security-through-obscurity" don't really work any more. That's why I've shifted to thinking about

strictly logical techniques such as insufficiency (the rendering insufficient of all sufficient categories). There are others too: compression, cryptography, degrowth, identity, irreversability, unilateral determination.

N.S.: Put another way, it is also a question of the "conceptual place" of the theory among other disciplines, its methodology and the borrowings it is able to melt and incorporate. Media theory or media archeology drew attention to this issue anew, inevitably reshaping the field of history, unlike, for example, the French schools of the history studies, involving more specifically technical content, even engineering knowledge that has been long estimated as mediocre (in comparison to highbrow theoretical physics), taking into account even what Kant disdainfully called Schwärmerei, in order to actually raise it and find its potentiality for the development of science now, not then. If to deplore the previous question, what in your view are the margins of the theory today? Could it be said science? Biology in particular?

Could the work of Catherine Malabou serve as an example here, since on the one hand, she deals with traditional philosophical issues, such as negativity, the Other, but on the other hand, uses the material of neurophysiology, the study of emotions?

This is also partly a question of personal trajectory – what kind of path is being paved between Clytemnestra and Rancier? How do you place yourself in relation to continental philosophy, French, German? What themes are then inherited, what historized, what brought in as new (if new is categorically allowed)?

A.G.: Many thinkers today speak floridly about merging philosophy with theory, or even of achieving détente between the analytic and continental camps within western philosophy. I'm not one of those people. Philosophy and theory are two entirely different activities. They can be defined precisely. I have no interest in merging them or achieving some kind of peace treaty. The reason is that philosophy is more or less indefensible, while theory is progressive, productive, and (best of all) interesting. I'm sure Socrates had the best of intentions, and I'm a keen student of the history of philosophy. But I think the young Marx put it best in his break with Hegel and in his famous Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, when he stated in no uncertain terms that the best response to philosophy is to cease doing it. I take that advice seriously, and, in turn, have no interest in philosophy. We could have a longer conversation about it, but the gist has to do with the principle of sufficiency that I mentioned before. Philosophy tends toward ideas, objects, and events that are sufficient, meaning that they contain some sort of autonomous essence or structure capable of sustaining themselves. This kind of sufficiency is most frequently referenced through terms like the transcendental, or perhaps through essence or structure, or maybe through universal categories, or various forms of abstraction. On this point I remain thoroughly Marxist: theory is the thing that resists philosophy. Which is to say, theory is the thing that doesn't propose any kind of sufficient category. Hence theory operates in the absence of transcendental structures and essences, in the absence of abstraction and representation. You mentioned the "conceptual place"; it's important for me to define that place specifically through this kind of materialist method. The "concept" is merely the impulse to embark upon such a place – always rational in shape but irrational in origin.

N.S.: What should the theory today primarily focus on? What should or could be its base, its starting point – or its (smallest) element?

And here comes a question of "objects", "actants" and other "agents" that seemed to be an obsession guiding various approaches that have been presented recently. Would it be possible – and in which way – to speak about your "elemental"

in this frame? About "generic" as a concept that you also work on? What vector they form shaping a kind of space of action? What do they revise? When one investigates an action in the world, does it matter whose action is it?

A.G.: The generic appears to some as utopia, even a kind of folly. So it's important for me to define the generic correctly as the result of a process, or, one might say, the outcome of an event. This helps assuage the problem of utopian privilege: the generic as a kind of "prize" won by certain historical actors, which couldn't be further from the truth. (In fact some commentators misdefine the generic and consider it simply a perversion of the "general" or the universal; I'll bracket that misreading for the moment and deal with the generic on its own terms.) The generic is "real" of course. But it's actually a kind of prophylactic, fending off the endless harassment of the symbolic order. (And here I part ways with mainstream psychoanalysis and am instead thoroughly asymmetrical; the symbolic order always needs the real, but the real has no use for the symbolic. This kind of asymmetry is necessary for psychoanalysis to realize its full political potential.) As a prophylactic space, the generic allows persons to be whatever they already are. This is why I said "real" in scare quotes a moment ago, since the real is just as much a sufficient category, and likewise needs to be undone along with all the rest. "Materialism" is the most common term for this process, and I'm happy to retain that label. And, yes, it most certainly matters "who" is at the center of this activity; such generic persons, in fact, are the only thing that matters!

N.S.: Is it possible, from your point of view, to link this question to the problem of subjectivity? The human? Or is it solely a problem of agency in action (an agency that does not exclude human, as he says) as is for example presented in B. Massumi's reading of William James? If you speak of an opaque clot, compressed, unreadable, indecipherable, nontransitive, who does not as much repeat itself as – in a way – shrinks and resists, then how could you comment on the idea of, for example, F. Rambeau (*Les secondes vies du sujet*, Paris, 2016) of dissoluted or "scattered" subject?

And how, then, you imagine this "clot" behaves as a part of community? "Feels" like Whitehead's unit, acting through "prehension"? In pulsing or fluctuating (and this is not only an hommage to J-L. Nancy, it is also about almost spontaneous construction and deconstruction of network's nodes, which you discussed in one of your books)? What then can create the invariance of these "nodes"? Are they of natural and/or cosmic character?

A.G.: We must historicize these interventions. A glorious year was 1968, but that was a different time with different tactics. I have no doubt that the "death of the author" must have felt revolutionary at some point in the past, but to me today is just feels like a death. A dead author is also a dead citizen, a dead revolutionary, a dead parent, a dead lover. I want authors back again; I'll even give a cheer for that most maligned category, authority, since there is no politics without authority, without the ability to make a claim. So the "shrinking and resisting" is really a commentary on the atrophy of a certain representational apparatus; the subject itself is not atrophying, quite the contrary. The generic person is, ironically, the most "full." But, no, I don't see much hope in the scattered or schizophrenic subject. That's Google's territory now. There's a kind of reticular pessimism at work today that says that the only response to networks is more networks. The only response to fragmentation is more fragmentation. Etc. We need better imagination. You mentioned Nancy, and his "Inoperative Community" is a great inspiration here. The reticular infrastructure is still a way to manage exception, what Esposito discussed under the heading of "immunity." Community is something different. It is the result of a process in which exception no longer makes sense.

N.S.: What other categories – newly invented or taken from other disciplines or sciences and appropriated – contemporary theory could use? And how to avoid, while introducing them, the romanticism that you diagnose, for example, in works by B. Stigler, or confusion and mixture, the fabulation? When genre (and method) are concerned, why, for example, compression is regarded as a metaphor while technique as an abstraction?

Some of the above mentioned terms clearly have visual connotations. How in this regard to relate to what we see, even if it no longer fits into the established framework of visual studies or left and queer rhetoric of "coming out"?

A.G.: The politics of representation is very male, very masculine. A distinction is asserted, and lodged within a space ready to receive it. It follows a logic of extension. And we could speak about this mode of visuality in terms of the space it requires, the space it defines (and how space defines it). I have no doubt that it's important to make claims in this way. But there's also a more pernicious strategy at work. We've already spoken about the generic as kind of "atrophied" representation; but we could also simply sidestep things like visuality and extension and focus on different things. Temporality, for instance, has been sidelined for half a century, more or less, at least since cinema lost its place at the forefront of popular media, or since the most cutting edge science and philosophy turned their attention away from time (Heidegger's phenomenology, Einstein's relativity) to other concerns. By the late 20th C it was common to hear of spatial categories like "situations" and "sites" and "zones" and "topologies." So perhaps it's time to return to time. Or something else, energy perhaps: the ergodic infrastructure. What's clear at least is that the most interesting developments today will not emerge from visuality or spatiality. Far more radical, in my view, are things like immanence and identity, apophatic reason, theories of determination, irreversability, destiny and fate.

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