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REPOSITIONING INTERPRETIVE DISCOURSE
From "Crisis of Reason" to "Weak Thought"

1. In 1979, there appeared on the Italian intellectual scene and anthology of essays titled <u>Crisi della ragione</u>, an interesting and stimulating ensemble of some of the most innovative voices of the past two decades.[1] The book may not have been the most startling cultural event of the late seventies, uncertain and grim as those years were, but it <u>did</u> make the point on a number of issues which had emerged basically after 1968, and it <u>did</u> give a "turn" to discussions in many disciplines in the early eighties. Focusing on a single theme but through the converging lens of thinkers from different schools, <u>Crisi della ragione</u> can be perceived as a spectroscopic picture useful in a number of ways. It can serve as a preliminary corpus of texts from which to begin an inquiry into, and a critique of, contemporary Italian thought. It is certainly a representative and authoritative florilegium of first-rate writers. And it can also serve as an introduction to the problem of interpretation because in certain disciplines (literary criticism, semantics, art history, historiography, linguistics) a great deal of time and effort during the past century or so has been devoted to redefining approaches and views, that is to say, to problems of method.

Here we must pause a second and introduce the coordinates of our study for, in fact, the problem of method brings us way back to Plato, and the ancient <u>diaphora</u> between poetry and philosophy.[2] Let me say in this context that independently of its specific thematic or historical configuration, the philosophy of literary criticism has always found it necessary to elaborate a set of structures and assign functions with which it could undertake research into, and for, knowledge (in its broadest sense). This is called its <u>method</u>, the formally valid pathway of the questioning. The legitimizing axioms or underlying principles are furnished by <u>theory</u>. Though in the main one can assert that in post-Renaissance times the principles-with some notable exceptions, like Utopistic and Idealist strains -- and to concentrate on the statute of the episteme and its applicability, nevertheless, since ancient times philosophy, and more pointedly philosophies of interpretation, have always relied upon a method of sorts: dialectic, syllogistic, experimental, inductive, and so on. Indeed, method precedes (and yet constitutes) praxis.

Method, however, will be found to be intrinsically related to ontology, to a general theory of being which, whether explicitly stated or implicitly supposed, can lend <u>credence</u> and

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1. Aldo Gargani, ed., <u>Crisi della ragione</u> (Torino: Einaudi, 1979), 366 pp. The ten essays are by Gargani, Carlo Ginsburg, Giulio Lepschy, Francesco Orlando, Franco Rella, Vittoria Strada, Remo Bodei, Nicola Badaloni, Salvatore Veca, and Carlo Augusto Viano. All translations are my own.

2. I have given a preliminary approximation to the issue in an article titled "Beyond the Ancient Diaphora: Sketch of a Postmodern Theory of Interpretation as Dialogue," first read at Cerisy-la-Salle in September, 1983, as part of the symposium on "La postmodernite," and later printed with the proceedings in <u>Krisis</u> (Houston), No. 3-4 (1985), pp. 112-28.

coherence to those same indisputable epistemological moves that method accords. In fact, as twentieth-century thought-especially in phenomenology, physics and psychology-has revealed, the method employed is never quite neutral or independent from either the observer or the observed, thus partaking in the constitution of the ontological status of the object of inquiry. We can say therefore that, in strictly philosophical terms, method always harks back to theory, to a centering vision of being which coincides with first principles. In our culture and time, theory is articulated in language-again, whether posited or "formal," or derived from experience or "natural"-and therefore is informed by a rhetorical component, a style or a format. The linguistic rendering of the first principles, the ontology, governs the articulation of knowledge, controlling thereby the method on its way to possible or plausible knowledge of the world or the text under scrutiny. We find then that a given ontology requires given method(s), and, conversely, that the epistemological legitimations of certain methods cannot do without-and can in fact lead us to-the underlying metaphysical ground of critical discourse (whatever that might be: Aristotelean, Hegelian, etc.). I take it then as a provisionally valid assumption that interpretive discourse is deeply concerned with method and that, furthermore, method ought to be studied primarily in terms of the domains that first give it life and legitimation, basically science and philosophies concerned with the issue of knowledge.

That is why Crisi della ragione becomes emblematic: by addressing the question of the present-day status of reason, of knowledge, of the methodological project, it compels reflection on the principles, the commitments, the appropriateness of one's activity. Thinkers in several different disciplines began to cast doubt on the history and the projects of Classical Reason, above all they wondered why the original presuppositions and procedures just weren't working out as expected. What could have gone awry, and how, given this impasse, this uneasy mood of intellectual disarray, how do we resolve the problem, move on, or exit? In turning to specific topics such as the question of legitimation, authority, hierarchy, complementarity, distinctiveness and, of course, method, scholars and thinkers also looked at the foundations of their own ideas and criticisms. And the foundations were no longer there.

2. The critique came from within and without. From the inside through some revealing studies done by philosophers of science and especially those well versed in Analytic Philosophy. From the outside at the hands of hermeneutics, as we will see in the third part of this paper. Let's go back a few years. In 1975 Aldo Gargani publishes a book titled Il sapere senza fondamenti,[3] literally "Knowledge without Foundations," with the just as important subtitle, "Intellectual Comportment as the Structuring of Common Experience." Here we read that, independently from the equally relevant issue of whether scientific theories can make up a history of science, scientific thought has indeed manifested flexibility and richness of ideas, introduced operational techniques and voiced a rhetoric of underlying motivations. In fact, scientific discourse has each and every time forged its own grammar and lexicon, defined the object of unquiry and so, finally, laid a structure or system to guide research. But, says Gargani:

In this sense, a scientific theory formulates statements about a domain of objects whose definition is already given.[4] The overbearing [invadente] analytical capacity of Cartesian

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3. Aldo Gargani, Il sapere senza fondamenti; la condotta intellettuale come strutturazione dell esperienza comune (Torino: Einaudi, 1975).

4. Ibid., p. 5.

epistemology-grounded as it was in Euclidean geometry-became an underlying principle of all "reasonable" explanations, of procedures and definitions, even of self-definitions. As Gargani puts it:

> The organon of Cartesian intuition read an order of intellectual evidences into a dominion comprised of metaphysical entities like extended substance, thinking substance and God. The grammatical status which Descartes attributed to these latter entities is responsible for an order of logico-metaphysical relations which <u>have been</u> structured <u>definitively</u> from the beginning.[5]

It is a case of method become ontology, for whatever could be said about the nature of things, had to be said in <u>that</u> language, with <u>that</u> grammar, within <u>that</u> community.[6] The implications of this working model, which became codified later through the work of Newton and Leibniz, are that at any given instance, a scientific theory (or its "method") can be called upon to tell us what's "really there" and how to go about knowing it.

If this is really what modern scientific thinking also harbors as a tacit ontological impulse, then it cannot do any longer. First of all, there's a historically demonstrable necessity on the part of rationality and the arguments of scientific theory to reach out into other disciplines, as well as other domains of reality, in order to borrow the norms and rules (grammatical in both a literal and a figurative sense), together with the values and social patterns that would grant them acceptability, propriety and sophistication (like higher mathematics, symbolic logic, very technical metatheories). Moreover, operating at a level of formal abstraction, knowledge may find itself with several possible grounding referents, or perhaps without any. In fact, it turns out that knowledge is literally without a formal ontological grounding, having rather developed into propositional logic, strategies of appropriation (or exploitation), legitimation, language games, and fostered <u>convictions</u> of True Understanding as derived-therefore as inferred, translated,

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5. <u>Ibid</u>., p. 8.

6. Gargani's argument sounds very close to Kuhn, as when he writes: "One scientific discipline does not replace another one without altering the latter's objectual statute, that is, its rules and practical categories of the concept of 'object'; nor can it ignore the system of norms, validity and legitimation that scientific statements must conform to. Each scientific doctrine establishes its own theorems by building a new grammatical model of objectivity and a new system of verification and operative strategies on the ashes of the objectual models and the operative paradigms of the supplanted theories"; pp. 5-6, one is reminded of Thomas S. Kuhn, who, in <u>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</u> (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975 [1962]), actually believes the "ashes" to be more like "bricks," as when he writes: "the new paradigm must promise to preserve a relatively large part of the concrete problem-solving ability that has accrued to science through its predecessors. Novelty for its own sake is not a desideratum in the sciences as it is in so many other creative fields. As a result, though new paradigms seldom or never possess all the capabilities of their predecessors, they usually preserve a great deal of the most concrete parts of past achievement and they always permit additional concrete problem-solutions besides" (p. 169). Gargani was investigating the tautological nature of scientific "doctrines" or "paradigms." However, there's no mention of Kuhn, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>. ("Postscript," 1969), p. 206, but see also pp. 168-71.; in the same context, see R. Rorty, <u>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</u> (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), VII (esp. p. 325); and, among the authors present in <u>Crisi della ragione</u>, the articles by Remo Bodei and Salvatore Veca.

removed-from highly specific/specialized instances of (scientific) discourse. Historically, says Gargani, a primary concern of philosophers like Leibniz, Hilbert, Frege, Russell, and Whitehead was to make sure the system had no flaws or, as Wittgenstein was to say years later, when it all started crumbling down, mathematics and metamathematics (Hilbert) were protecting the body of knowledge from the hidden sickness of its own foundations. In this regard, the Italian philosopher writes:

> Actually, the problem of foundations can be seen against the validity of mathematical procedures insofar as the corpus of mathematical statements [enunciati] is not a system generated by the privileged strategy of foundations. This is so because the scheme of foundations is entrusted to linguistic-conceptual strategies which seem to be more problematic than the structure and procedures they were meant to protect and warrant. Such is the strategy or the assumption which entrusts some "primitive" (elementary) concepts and propositions with the general authority or power to dispose of, within a discipline and from the top down, an indefinite sequence of operations, of procedures whithin a notational system. In reality we are dealing with a methodological strategy grounded upon misunderstanding [fraintendimento] of our categorical apparati, of our inferential structures and use of language.[7]

This position is further strengthened when, in that same year, Paul K. Feyerabend's Against Method appears, challenging the epistemological presuppositions of the other, "strong" rational current, the scientific one. Feyerabend demonstrates that any worthwhile breakthrough in science has always occurred when the scientist "broke the rules," so to speak, foregrounding the necessity of redefinition of standards and procedures. This is what happened when Galileo, bending Aristotle somewhat (for instance, on the notion of unchanging, immutable sky), changes the type of observation required in order to validate a new paradigm (Copernicus'), removes personal, subjective opinions, and proclaims and establishes that a community of scientists can and must be in agreement on what will be considered true knowledge (creating thus a social and moral paradigm as well, a language of exclusion and self-imposed authority which decides what's valid and what's not).[8] But of course, as we go on to discover in many of the essays contained in Crisi della ragione, it was precisely a highly developed and formalized version of the Galilean paradigm and the methodology it spawned that prevailed in the sciences.[9]

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7. Aldo Gargani, Il sapere senza fondamenti, p. 80.

8. The problems discussed by Feyerabend are of course of a slighty different nature, and we need not get into Kuhn, Feyerabend, Lakatos polemics. Our interest here is more general in that what is sought is the external or at any rate de-limiting horizon of method via the discourse of its own explication or legitimation.

9. Whether in good or bad faith, that is not at issue here. The question of good or bad faith raises the specters of consciousness, values and intersubjecticvity, which are systematically excluded from the rationalis and scientific enterprise for not being the "serious and important 'cognitive' part (the part in which we meet our obligation to rationality)" and belonging perhaps to "hermeneutics," which "is charged with everything else." I am citing from R. Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, pp. 318-19. My use of Rorty's distinction between epistemology and hermeneutics is in a very broad, mostly figurative sense.

3. In the "Introduction" to the 1979 book <u>Crisi della ragione</u>, Gargani returns to these themes once again, sketching a brief yet revealing history of scientific thought and the theories of knowledge that inform it. Sometime during the period 1870-1900, reason falters and stumbles, entering a state of "crisis." Specifically, with Positivism two things start to happen. On the one hand, actual empirical research tuns up all sorts of data, structures and possibilities of investigation such that many sciences have to be literally invented, new taxonomies devised, new utensils forged, novel theories circulated. On the other, reason elevates itself higher and higher, abstracts itself into an all-encompassing plenum <u>preceding</u> nature, and is ready to offer a universalizing grammar or metalanguage guaranteeing the acceptability and institutionalization of its practices as well as the deployment of its results. The abyss between the two poles widens: the traditional metaphysical prejudice of unchanging substances, which has been relegitimated by Newtonian physics as the theory of the conversion of matter and energy, was shattered by Einstein's relativistic theorem, whose definition of the universe was: "a formal legitimizing invariance with respect to the different observation systems." Space had lost its traditional, almost divine primacy, time was lifted from its Kantian hinges and there was nothing left to serve as <u>a priori</u> for any justification or knowledge claim. The philosophical consequences of this revolution within physics were far ranging. If we allow for the inevitable distortion at work when translating from one conceptual system into another (as Feyerabend had argued, all systems are incommensurable with one another),[10] the letter Einstein wrote to Maurice Solovine (dated 24 April 1920) can be used to enframe what is meant by crisis of reason when its leading, paradigm-setting discipline finds itself hovering over nothingness. Paraphrased freely: There's no notion in physics whose use is <u>a priori</u> justified or necessary. A notion acquires its right to be solely on the grounds of its clear and univocal concatenation in the linking of events, or of physical occurrences. Thus for the theory of relativity the notions of absolute simultaneity, absolute speed, absolute acceleration, etc., are untenable, because their univocal relation to experience is impossible. For the same reason the notions of "plane." "straight line," etc., upon which Euclidean geometry is founded, are confuted. Of any physical notion, what must be given is a definition such that one can decide, by and large because of this definition, if it can be verified concretely.[11]

There are no absolutes: from within science the question of situating the new methods and fields of knowledge first required and then demanded to look into and consider <u>other</u> areas, and in fact we witness the emergence of a variety of proposals and responses via the works of

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10. See Feyerabend, <u>Against Method</u> (NLB, 1975), par. 17. This hypothesis can be extremely fruitful if approached from the standpoint of Rhetorics with a view to the hermeneutical implications it can have. It would certainly constitute a point of rupture, the escape point in a network or membrane, a channel between epistemology and hermeneutics or between theory and method.

11. Cited in Gargani, "Introduction" to <u>Crisi dell ragione</u>, pp. 22-23. In <u>On the Method of Theoretical Physics</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), p. 6, Einstein says that pure, logical thought cannot give us any knowledge of the world of experience: all knowledge of reality begins in experince and ends with experience. As far as reality is concerned, conclusions obtained by means of purely rational procedures are entirely vacuous. See also Werner Heisenberg, <u>Across the Frontiers</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), Chapter 1 <u>et infra.</u>

Bergson, Husserl, Freud, Dilthey, Simmel and, Gargani should add, Croce.[12] Gargani's conclusions, after going through the inconsistencies and aporias of twentieth-century logic, is that today rationality [la razionalita] can only be given in two possible articulations: as the construction and application of rules and guidelines which we deploy to help out in the business of living; and in the formal transition from one rule to the next in exercising different operations, above and beyond the specificity or specialness of the matters dealt with. Thus the anthology of texts on the "crisis of reason" announces that its explicit intention is to chart the limits in the sense of the "external" parameters of discursive reason, assembling a corpus of hypotheses and steps towards alternatives which would bring out what the light of reason had either blinded or couldn't see because in the shade.[13]

   4. Carlo Ginsburg's essay, "Spie, radici per un paradigma indiziario," later reissued in a book,[14] draws us closer to the relationship between the claims and failures of reason and the effects it may have on interpretation. During the same period mentioned by Gargani, 1870-1900, Ginsburg says that the "crisis" actually stimulates a "methodological revolution" whose emblematic figure, at least in the art world, is Giovanni Morelli, a multifarious and not atypically diabolical late nineteenth-century character with many personalities and several legal identities, who furthermore exercised a direct influence on both Conan Doyle and Sigmund Freud.[15] Morelli's insight was to devise a method for the correct identification of an original canvas when the market for imitations and travesty was burgeoning. Morelli discovered that in identifying and attributing an original painting, the critic had to direct his attention to minor, discounted, unthematized details, and not to the obvious formal themes and configurations, or even the idea and poetic championed by the given author or critic. In the marginal detail one can capture a specific trait which expresses a painter's relaxed, less vigilant and unsupervised execution. As a

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12. Croce's works, especially his Aesthetics (1901-02), the book on Hegel (1906) and the Logic (1905), are in fact a theoretical and ideologically systematizing response to turn-of-the-century crises, especially in history, science and interpretation theory, and influenced Italian and European thought for over half a century. His almost complete remotion from the Italian philosophical debate of the past twenty-five years may well constitute a needed chapter in cultural history (for, in subliminal ways, his presence is still active and determining). The "reasons" for his repudiation by critics and philosophers in the late fifties and through the sixties are discussed in my Interpretive Thresholds (see note 2).

13. Crisi, p. 50. That Gargani turns to authors like Musil, Hofmannsthal, Kafka, Dostoievski to make the figurative point of illustrating the Crisis of Classical Reason is important in a number of ways, not least bein the fact that the Italian philosoher's subsequent works have explored in detail this particular juncture between epistemology and fiction and have contributed immensely to an understanding of the interim space between the procedures of the mind and the actual execution of action (especially, once again, as Rhetorics, which is not, however, specifically thematized by Gargani). See his Freud, Wittgenstin, Musil (Milano: Shakespeare & Co., 1982), especially the last chapter which is a "conversation," pp. 106-27.

14. In Italian in Miti emblemi spie (Torino: Einaudi, 1986); in English it first appeared in Hisory Workshop, 9, Spring (1980), pp. 5-36, then in U. Eco and T. Sebeok, eds., The Sign of Three (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983). See also Ginsburg's The Cheese and the Worms (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

15. Ginsburg in Crisi della ragione, pp. 62-66.

result, nails, leaves of trees, curves of the clouds, the lines that define and earlobe, roofs of houses, the hair of one of the persons depicted and other such areas of the canvas become the object of which facilitates the identification, distribution and cataloging of swerves, indices, or spie, as Ginsburg calls them, literally clues. The method actually is not a method at all in the traditional, Galileo-Newton sense of the word, because it must seek out that which cannot be repeated, what has been said or done once, assuring thus authenticity, the truth and/or identity of the painting. No need to recall at length how this "new" attention to minor detail, to forgotten evidence, to causal expression can furnish building material for a theory of dreamwork and the lapsus (Freud), or the emergence of the detective novel (Sherlock Holmes cycle), or, more sinister consequence, the foundation of a criminal museum with its attendant "scientific" theories, like phrenology, and what turned out to be a successful method in medicine, symptomatology. The years 1870-1880 saw the disclosure in culture of an indexical paradigm, paradigma indiziario, literally of traces, based upon a semeiotics (and not a semiotics because at that time the referent paradigm was medicine) which claimed a different grounding or, just as important, a different discursive strategy. This indexical paradigm, moreover, has ancient roots.[16] Drawing upon the epistemologically oriented reconstruction of what life might have been like for Neolithic hunters, Ginsburg asserts that writing takes place before reading, on the basis of this description: the act of deciphering and decoding the clues when stalking prey (or an enemy) entails performing an operation which refers each single time to that situation as the result of projections distilled from an infinite number of precise, irrevocable details or vicissitudes. Neolithic man had to abstract forward in time, as it were, on the basis of many like situations in the past. There's guessing going on constantly in the process of reading (and therefore in the process of attributing meaning or significance to) those minor details or traces, an ad hoc "divining" in the presence of unparadigmatic statements derived from what in a later historical stage would be called low, gross, unaesthetic impudenda, "droppings" scattered by the wayside and ignored by a high, noble, unperturbed idea of reason, whether Platonic or Aristotelean. Drawing also from the religious, medical and legal history of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, Ginsburg explains how this "primitive" form of knowledge acquisition had to be reported case by case, and at no time without the mediating presence of another person, typically a doctor, a judge or a priest. Though one important trunk of this most originary hermeneutics developed or branched out into mysticism, religious prophetizing and, at its worst, into political (authoritarian or despotic) legitimizing of what is true, and what can or cannot be done in a society, another trunk was deprived of any likely ramifications, and was literally pared off, suppressed: subjective, once-and-forever instances of personal experience and contingent evaluations were banned from the courts of reason: they had no attendible protocols, or "method," to speak of. When Galileo's physics was finally crowned the Grand Model of Scientific Inquiry, says Ginsburg, any type of knowledge which necessarily depends upon

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16. The indexical or clue-motivated paradigm is also called by Ginsburg divinatorio, which entails guessing and forecasting a future set of events. In this Ginsburg distances himself from Sebastiano Timpanaro-The Freudian Slip, 1976 [1974]-by insisting that perhaps what ought to be revived or re-explored is precisely this connection between epistemologically inspired disciplines and a knowing of a "magical" or "divinatory" type. Ginsburg does not mention Vico's New Science as a primary text of research in this direction, nor does he cite sources in the hermeneutic tradition which have already addressed the issue. Concerning this latter point, Gianni Vattimo was justifiably surprised, as we'll see further down, in sec. 9.

<u>qualitative</u>, individual estimation of the facts at hand (and which therefore rested on "untrustworthy, subjective" interpretation), was debarred from speaking to, and about, truth. Readapting the Thomist formula, <u>individuum est ineffabile</u>, it was decreed that inquiry may have a formal subject, a verifiable referent to talk about, but not an individual person's testimony <u>in carne e ossa</u>: of real people one cannot talk! Two other disciplines seem to wallow in this predicament: history and philology. As indeed is the case with the medic, the historian and the philologist know their subject of inquiry only indirectly or with strongly sfumato contours: they too must rely, infact, on traces, clues, conjectures, specific and unrepeatable events, ever-changing "feelings" or "hunches" about what they are pursuing, resulting in a strange relationship with others.[17]

If we now turn our attention to literary criticism, we discover-interesting thesis-that its destiny was mapped out from the start: because of the radical cut-off points constituted by the invention of writing in early societies and the invention of the printing press in our more recent historical memory, literary criticism was steered toward an abstracting, rationalistic and thus formalizing practice. In its broadest sense, Ginsburg says, total criticism is born with the first transcription of the Homeric poems, which process required the erasurre of an important series of experiences concerning the voice, gestures, physical presence (its "performance" aspect?), tactile sensation and communication of the piece, etc.[18] During the second stage, with the codified alphabet required by the mechanical printing press, the physical relationship with writing disappears altogether, the text becomes dematerialized and all sensory perceptive referents are scraped off the interpretive tablet. Today, in fact, a "primary" or "authentic" or "standard" text can have no "physical support (Lachmann method)." With intonation, calligraphy and now design gone, textual criticism accepts the axiom that whatever counts is what can be reproduced, and the possibility of quantification, standardization and distribution whithin other orders of discourse. And, once again, it is precisely Galileo who points out that philology must go scientific. Recalling the epistemological figura both ancient and medieval of the book of nature, Galileo suggests that nature can ultimately be understood, provided we read the book properly, and to do so one has to learn its language, which, it turns out, is made up "of triangles, circles...numbers and motion," in other words, mathematics, and not the "smells and tastes and sounds." "Outside of the living animal," he writes, "these latter are nothing but names." I feel this may help in understanding the emergence of a little explored anti-anthropomorphic streak in the theorizing and applications of science.

As Ginsburg sees it, this model goes tilt when the time comes to account for events, situations and data which it cannot constitutively deal with. While Morelli unwittingly was

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17. Again, Ginsburg's analysis seems wide open to a hermeneutic conversation, especially for the ontological and phenomenological assuptions it harks back to without thematizing them. More than that, it is this necessary "included third" (medic, judge, prophet) that needs further exploration in view of an interpretive discourse that <u>begins</u> with an account of the theory-method (the hermeneutics-epistemology) relation. On the other hand, on the basis of his other theoretical writings-see <u>Miti, emblemi, spie</u>-he seems to prefer more "typological" and "semiotic" approaches to inquiry, and more recently he has been inspired by Propp and Freud.

18. <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 71-72.

deploying what Peirce at about the same time called abduction,[19] and was therefore attempting a syncretism between different approaches-a science of signs or semiotics; a phenomenology of perception a suspension of judgment; and finally fine tuning the laws that govern hypotheses-the British government was already very consciously applying the new model. There was a problem at that time, the historian informs us, of identifying each and every person (the <u>subjects</u>, so to speak) in the Commonwealth. After several impractical solutions, Herschel stumbles on <u>fingerprinting</u> as the ultimate fail-safe "method" of identifying everyone individually and thus make for greater social control. It was applied to the Bengali colony in 1880. The reasoning behind it went something like this: if reality is opaque, if "all those natives look alike," there are specific traits somewhere that mark the transition from chaos into atomistic entities, which in turn can be introjected into a "rational" system of causes and effects (we might even say of statistical forecasting). Yet for Ginsburg, these fundamentally <u>mute</u> or expropriated forms of knowledge-gathering (<u>and</u> knowledge-production) are distinctly related to <u>low</u> [<u>bassi</u>] indices of understanding grounded on the senses-the casual glance, the gut feeling, the sporadic premonition, the "winning hand" and so on-and are external if not extraneous to the various articulations concerning a <u>rational</u> versus an <u>irrational</u> epistemological problem. The <u>sapere indiziario</u> is a <u>different kind</u> of knowing, one which may influence a procedure such that it becomes a "paradigm" (but it is not made exactly clear whether this partakes in the Kuhnian process of substitution). Certainly in Ginsburg's approach there's much of the old building blocks still present, as inevitably some must remain.[20] But before proceeding with a critique of this particular exposition of the crisis of reason, let us see how another philosopher writes the same story.

5. Taking off from a highly emblematic book, Horkheimer's <u>The Eclipse of Reason</u>, Carlo Augusto Viano also backtracks to about 1870-1880 as the period when radical questioning of the claims of reason began.[21] As a result, says Viano, all the rationalisms of this century have had as one of their main targets a critique of technical-scientific knowledge, especially as the latter burgeoned into an all-enclosing totalizing process. From the point of view of <u>Historical Rationalism</u>, says the philosopher, modern science is the result of a peculiar convergence between social-economic development and history as ideology. This position, basically predicated upon the dyad reason/revolution, is dialectically grounded upon an even more

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19. See "Abduction and Induction," in C.S. Peirce, <u>Collected Papers</u>, 6.522 [reprinted in <u>Philosophical Writing of Peirce</u>, edited by J. Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955), pp. 150-56]. This is my observation, not Ginsburg's. Because Ginsburg's analysis seems to me simultaneously open to both semiotics and hermeneutics (albeit of a "Peircian" kind), it is important to consider the Modern origins of these two disciplines at a moment (coincidence?) when there's developing a variously articulated historical "crisis of reason"; and Peirce's work certainly embodies one of the most important efforts in <u>seeing through</u> this (or any!) crisis. See Massimo Bonfantini, "Introduzione" to C.S. Peirce <u>Le leggi dell' ipotesi</u> [anthology from the <u>Collected Papers</u>] (Milano: Bompiani, 1984), pp. 7-30; and, for a more radical assessment of Peirce's work in relation to a hermeneutics of the sign, Carlo Sini, <u>Semiotica e filosofia</u> (Bologna: Il Mulino: 1978), Ch. I, pp. 11-102; and, also by Sini, <u>Passare il segno</u> (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1981), Part One, pp. 11-60.

20. See above, note 6.

21. Carlo Augusto Viano, "Reason, Abundance, Belief," in <u>Crisi</u>, pp. 303-66.

overarching Reason of the Emancipated Subject. Science must live up to its instrumental essence. Yet with the crisis of the positivistic conception of science as a historically determining force, an alternative solution or development surfaces. Science can also be thought of as the organizational capacity of potentially available resources within a given social group or society and can actually concern itself with the proper formulation (we might add, with the code or legal tender grammar) of conventional theories, the elaboration of relations among data. Finally, science is transfigured into means to fulfill disparate ends, a manageable closed system of operations with a precarious if at all perceptible communication with human nature. If knowledge coincides with science, says Viano, it cannot host within its dwelling the language of its legitimation of foundation because either a) scientific knowledge is applicable to diverse purposes and objects, or b) it has no formal category of judgment to critique the ends to which it necessarily finds itself committed to. Ergo, we may conclude, the same type of rational discourse can put man on the moon or destroy Hiroshima: reason, in short, was split up again into two extreme polarities, each seeking the impossible Grund. Yet reason also tried to overcome these dichotomies by returning to Classical Reason, thus uncorporating its legitimation as coexistensive, coterminous with different, "other" unquestionable (because unquestioned, ultimately) frames of reference, the One, Nature, Truth, whatever immutable eidos or value was available from the time before the Galileo-Newton paradigm emerged. The various attempts at selfredefinition can be seen at work in dialectics, metaphysics, rhetorics, semantics, linguistics, logic.[22] Disciplines which convened unanimously in either radicalizing reason's application or in mortifying it in order to then repress and refute the tools employed by positive, scientific knowledge. On the other hand, however, it was precisely the coexistence and proliferation of these disciplines that made it possible and indeed necessary to account for the differentiation and inexhaustibility of possible theorems and points of view, and a truly Modern Science-one which had, moreover, also given us Darwin and darwinism[23] -felt compelled to call upon or invent a higher order of abstraction somehow still rooted in reality. And here surfaces and interesting situation: reason institutes itself as belief. Reason, in other words, reclaims its authority and power to speak not only for, but as the truth of things, by falling back on extra-theoretical, extra-logical domains, a "strategy," we might appropriately say, that meshes in smoothly with the demands and expectations of early imperialistic capitalism. Reason has now got itself into a double, because on one level it still would like to make universal claims, statements about reality which apply for all times and in all cases, above "lowly" subjective claims; on the other level it must allow for the empirical evidence of two apparently opposing or contradictory theories: there's an electromagnetic theory of light, and a corpuscular or quantum theory of light; there's a classical mechanics and a relativistic celestial mechanics contemporaneous with each other, actually depending one upon the other for the sake of conceptual dialectic as well as didactic explanation.[24] The claims to Truth must therefore be relinquished: the ultimate grounding of

22. Much as we saw above at the end of section 3, when Gargani points out how the faltering of the Classical Modes spurs thinkers to envision other "philosophies," here again the tacit backdrop to Viano's study are the enormous efforts of thinkers like Labriola, Lenin, Dilthey, Husserl, Russell and Whitehead, Saussure who sought to force, change or readapt reason and its methodological extension to new or different sectors of inquiry and areas of reality.

23. See the highly stimulating Derridian-Feyerabendian reading of Darwing by George Levine, "Darwin, the Problem of Authority," in Raritan, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Winter 1984), pp. 30-61.

reason as it evolved through the scientific enterprises of recent history does not reside <u>within</u> the horizon of reason (which is to say in <u>its</u> language) but outside of it, mainly in fields and activities whose primary concern is not of necessity the legitimacy of reason or the implementation of power.

From our perspective, this of course raises the specter of complex problems related to the im/possibility of "translating" from one discipline into another, the typical gesture of adapting models and/or sets of data originating within a specific code into a different set of models and data within a markedly different system or code. It is the problem raised by (re)thinking of what happens when the anthropologist deploys the metalanguage (its idea of reason, in a sense) of the linguist, the political theorist the language and principles of Marxian economics, the literary hermeneuticist the lexicon and historical referents of juridical exegesis, the literary critic the values and adjectives of philosophical aesthetics. It is an issue to which the work of Kuhn and Feyerabend have given impetus, and has more recently received serious reflection by the diverse proposals of Rorty and Lyotard.[25]

Viano's conclusiions on this point are similar to Aldo Gargani's perception (already explored in the 1975 book, <u>Il sapere senza fondamenti</u>) that foundationless reason seeks its ultimate justification through the discursive practices of a specialized public, a consensus-gathering and -producing community which ascribes to itself (to its <u>definition</u> of a <u>system</u> of <u>protocols</u> and <u>procedures</u>) the right to determine whether something is meaningful, "scientific" or useful, finally confirming a determinate power structure.[26] The development of these problematics through the twentieth century has witnessed the repeated though subtle recourse, on the part of science and rationalism, to the humanities-despite the historically recent debate on the "two cultures"[27]-for discursive "defences" that bear the imprint of ideology, or an "archival humanism," as Spanos would call it.[28] At the same time, however, science is indeed humbled,

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24. See Werner Heisenberg, <u>Across the Frontiers</u>, Chs. 2, 4, 12, 14.

25. Jean-François Lyotard, in particular, makes a case for contrast (conflict) and untranslatability between different families of sentences, a situation which ought to be of interest simultaneouly to Law, Politics, Literary Studies and Interpretation Theory because we are confronted, from the beginning, with the problem of power, legitimation and judgement; see <u>Le Différend</u> (Paris: Minuit, 1983). The Italian translation of this text-Feltrinelli, 1985-apparently got a cool reception.

26. See, among others, Lyotard, <u>The Postmodern Condition</u> (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984 [1979]).

27. See the brilliant critical exposition of this debate (which goes much further than the relatively superficial C.P. Snow booklet by the same title published in 1963 [Italian translation: Milano, 1964]), by philosopher Giulio Preti, <u>Retorica e Logica</u> (Torino: Einaudi, 1974 [1968]), whose historical reconstruction and analyses anticipate those in the <u>Crisi del sapere</u>, as well as some chapters in Rorty's <u>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</u>.

28. See William Spanos, "The Appollonian Investment of Modern Humanist Education," in <u>Cultural Critique</u>, No. 1 (Fall 1985), pp. 7-72; and in <u>Cultural Critique</u>, No. 2 (Winter 1985-86), pp. 105-34. Also, many of his articles as they appeared in <u>Boundary 2</u>. The seminal thinker behind this is of course Michel Foucault: see <u>The Micro-physics of Power, Discipline and Punishment</u> and other (even earlier) texts.

albeit in a sinister way. For it is now accepted that science (and its extension, technology)[29] can operate effecting strong exclusivist closures owing to the quick availability of several paradigms and/or instruments, refining itself especially when the given venture entails that subjective evaluations be kept under check. In short, the emphasis in scientific research is still predominantly directed toward what can be produced, reproduced, packaged and sold.

Even if we side with the other influential trunk of reason, the one that goes under the name of <u>Naturalistic Rationalism</u>, we still end up with the creation of legitimizing discourses dependent upon <u>belief</u>, that is, more pointedly, a social discursivity predicated on <u>how</u> believable a given-in this case: rational, scientific-construct can become. According to Viano, Santayana and Whitehead aimed at founding a rational ethics on the basis of the epistemological indivisibility of reason and nature, which is to say on the idea fused with or into the real. In this metaphysic, nature <u>is</u> total process, and the subsequent theoretical and methodological conviction, that "it is the case that," sets itself up as the axiomatics of possibility and eventually governs the availability of a legitimizing rationality. It is yet another example of what our modern-day Heideggerians, from Vattimo to Schürmann to Derrida, would very likely call "strong," logocentric discourse.[30] Subsuming the sciences, Naturalistic Rationalism appeals to a mystical union of the ideal and the real, banking heavily on the acceptance of unmeasurable principles and axioms and relying on intuitive participation and support. Reason will thus find itself changed into an artificial, conventionalized grammar for a specific group of initiates who may, however, loan its "services" to extra-theoretical, nonrational domains, or alternatively speak for them but not without having first translated the rest of the world into its formal categories. As Adorno would observe, it turns into ideology.

It should come as no surprise then to learn that within these two leading and influential traditions of reason (or of the idea of rationality), faced with irreversible and unpredictable social changes, today and idea of reason, or even a more concrete rational "system," can find acceptance ("success") on the basis of its "elegance" in higher mathematics (R. Thom), "style" or "rhetoric" in criticism and psychoanalysis (de Man, Lacan, Derrida), "measurability" in laboratory sciences, level of predictability in any kind of forecasting (from the weather report to the stock market), "accountability" in labor and management, and so on. It seems, in short, that <u>validity</u> and <u>appropriateness</u> (no matter how we define them) are now more crucial concerns for reason and scientific thought than were the "old" questions of <u>truth</u> or of <u>foundations</u>. Viano doesn't say this and one may harbor the doubt that perhaps-as we shall see below-this state of events ought not to be seen as indicative of a "crisis" at all. For Viano, instead, having evolved into an instance of belief, science and the reason that subtends it oscillate between a supreme

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29. I am deliberately generalizing a common denominator for science and technology for the sake of clarity and brevity. I am not unaware of how this relationship constitutes a central philosophical problem in our times, beginning with Heidegger and on through the works of Barrett, Habernas, Schürmann, Vattimo, Ihde, and others.

30. I am thinking of works which, above and beyond their differences (no pun intended), seem to favor a de-centering, de-stabilizing approach to the Great Metaphysical Canons; for Vattimo, see <u>Al di là del soggetto</u> (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1984 [1981], esp. pp. 7-26 and 51-74; and the essay in Norberto Bobbio et al., <u>Che cosa fanno oggi i filosofi</u> (Milano: Bompiani, [1980], pp. 185-97. For Schürmann, <u>Le principe d'anarchie</u> (Paris: Seuil, 1982), esp. Chs. III and IV. For Derrida, <u>Marges de la philosophie</u> (Paris: Minuit, 1972), and several essays from his other books.

(idea of) knowledge and its actual existence within specific and determinate rituals and conventions, though concerned also with what is "on the ground." Thus reason in science can be understood as basically the attempt to confer the form of universal knowledge to proofs and metastatements originating within specific communities, sharing particular beliefs.[31]

      6. That an alleged crisis of reason would compel an explicit reflection on method was inevitable. It is what Salvatore Veca undertakes with the aid of precise historical references, arriving at the conclusion that, in its most general characterization, the method of reason strives to apply through all of time and in any given circumstance. Traces of this pattern are present already in Plato's <u>Sophist</u> (258d; on what to do and what not to do), and the <u>Parmenides</u> (136e: on method as a path to everywhere).[32] But Veca emphasizes that these ways (from the etymon of <u>method</u>) are now become <u>modes</u> [<u>modi</u>] of actual itineraries that summon the monism of reason to permit, to start up, so to speak, such an inquiry, and nothing more. And yet even within this more "literary" reconstruction of the rise and fall of the idea of reason, what is brought forward as either important or as perhaps partly responsible for the "crisis" is the emphasis on the multiplicity of events, situations and "knowledges" of the hitherto insignificant kind, traces and debris from the "low" or debilitated sectors of experience.[33] It is here that reason must open up, abandon its Cartesian monism and take stock of itself as being essentially "plural." There's a possibility advanced here that the <u>modes</u> of reason can indeed cut across the aggrandizing universal methods, yet yield the discursivity needed to tackle previously unseen (and/or unseeable) aspects of inquiry. For Veca, there's always a localized, individualized teleology at work in any-dialectical-conception of working knowledge, though this does not necessarily entail an equally strong claim on foundations: knowledge is working knowledge, application, use, such and such a deployment of <u>a modality</u> of reason.[34] Interestingly enough, Veca's own method-become-mode of exposition consists in "suggesting" some images, often returning to the guiding background question: "What is your problem?" and oscillating between monism and pluralism.

      Giulio Lepschy's short contribution to this volume centered on the rationalism that informs linguistics and is confined to the exploration of some precepts in Chomskyan theory-the distinction between <u>competence</u> and <u>execution</u> or realization.[35] It concludes by pointing out that the Platonism of Chomsky cannot prove the existence of a <u>real</u> standard language and that ultimately the linguist's research is forever precluded from any perfectly selfexplanatory rational order of discourse. For Lepschy, moreover, Chomsky's Cartesianism is to be identified with a "hard" or "strong" rationality, especially as transformational-generative grammar cannot deal with "weak," "soft" [<u>morbide</u>] formalizations, like those arising spontaneously during a conversation or when answering a questionnaire: the decision as to what is standard and what is

31. Viano, in <u>Crisi della ragione</u>, p. 349.

32. Salvatore Veca, "Modes of Reason," in <u>Crisi della ragione</u>, pp. 281-302.

33. <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 293, 297 <u>et infra</u>, which sounds very much like Ginsburg. <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 99 and elsewhere (see above, sec. 4).

34. <u>Ibid</u>, p. 300.

35. Giulio Lepschy, "Linguistics, Science and Rationality," in <u>Crisi della ragione</u>, p. 107-25.

deviation is, in short, not grounded upon an immanence or the truth of reason, but rather upon non-rational or at any rate extra-rational forces and situations.

Franco Rella's contribution focused on the "discrediting of Reason" as the result of its having for too long assumed that the force, the re-cognizing capability inherent in rationality, is best realized as differentiating procedures, as idioms, pathways, logics.[36] This would lead-as indeed it has in the past-to the instituting of instrumental formal orders, or sets, and eventually patterns of social practices. This assumption undermines Reason's own project of furnishing a cognitive picture of the world. Moreover, reduced to mere instrumentality, reason cannot avail itself of the prestige it formerly boasted with authority. Again it seems that the question is tuned toward the outside of its realm, for Reason realizes itself as (as if) discourse, pointing to a sector of interpersonal relations which strictly speaking is not primarily of Reason, or of a scientific project in and by itself. Vittorio Strada, in his essay "Interpretation and Change,"[37] addresses the same issue by charting the vicissitudes of the idea of reason through Marxism and more sociologically oriented studies. Also out to consider whether we ought not "revise Marx," by the end neither Marx nor the reason supportive of a scientific method is recognizable: for Strada the transformations brought about by successive interpretations (and therefore applications) have changed reason, but for the worse and, if seen from a certain point of view, indeed have "degenerated" into rhetorical ploys, politics, utopias. An unpleasant conclusion shared in part by Nicola Badaloni,[38] who set out to explore the analogy between the production/demand dialectic in economics with the referent/modality dualism of logic. Here we learn that with the advent of linguistic games, there sprouted on the contemporary horizon a number of logics which insured the possibility of decentered discourses: the so-called contrafactuals become an ordinary exercise of reasonableness, and reference mere (which is to say, "insignificant") presupposition and linking.

7. Taking off from Gramsci and Freud in order to develop a working interpretive scheme which would account for the dynamics of an understanding [comprendere] which is at the same time changing [modificarsi], Remo Bodei[39] brings the issue onto more tangible social and historical contexts, depicting a crisis which is, after all, positive, something good, stimuli to lay to rest what some earlier or more "primitive" form of rationality has "conquered" for individual and society alike and made available within a communality of relationships, in order to prod further onward when "resistance," "dilemmas," and other "unforeseen" situations develop. The gist of Bodei's article is very much in favor of a relentless search for more strategies of investigation, provided the old distinction between "high" or "elitist" and "low" or "base" notions of reason is abandoned, and that thinking proceed with a desire or a willingness to accept (integrate, deploy until new "limits" are reached") the fact that changes of all types (perhaps

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36. Franco Rella, "The Discrediting of Reason," in Crisi della ragione, pp. 149-77.

37. Vittorio Strada, "Interpretation and Change," in Crisi della ragione, pp. 179-96; original title is actually Interpretare e trasformare.

38. Nicola Badaloni, "Reason and Change [Ragione e mutamento]," in Crisi della ragione, pp. 241-78.

39. Remo Bodei, "To Comprehend, To Modify: Models and Perspectives of a Transforming Rationality," in Crisi della ragione, pp. 197-240.

capable of cutting across established fields of knowledge) may be revealed. There's crisis, says Bodei, when we realize that there are still problems of inextricable complexity which we have not yet solved, like violence, unemployment, exploitation, incurable diseases, and so on. There's crisis because no none system or organizing principle can account any longer for the proliferation of subsystems and highly sophisticated working models not really available to everyone. There's crisis from an overabundance of discoveries, of methods, of techniques due to the exponential growth and metamorphoses of "knowledges" [saperi]. There's crisis in the subsequent dilemmas created in reproducing it all through schools, training apparati, means of transformation and communication which in turn alter the very processes of cognition and understanding. There's crisis because sectors of society, of emerging countries which had hitherto no access to the voice and formulas of knowledge "that counts," are now learning to talk and think independently, and devising their own strategies of reason while expressing different types of knowledges and values. But all of this need not announce that humankind should plunge into despair or apocalyptic skepticism or, worse yet, induce a reactionary obscurantism. Quite the contrary, says Bodei; why must we still insist on a clear-cut distinction between encyclopedic knowledge and highly specialized knowledge, or between omniscient speculation and job-induced idiocy? Why must we choose between the alternatives of a unique, monolithic, prevaricator Reason and the "reasons" of unrelated, solitary, untranslatable events or situations? Should it not rather be the case that we consider the relation between a greater and a lesser division of (scientific) labor, between a broader or more restricted translatability, capacity for renewal, "permeability" of knowledge and experience?

It emerges clearly that Bodei's discussion is straddling the abyss between reason and history: on the one hand, the stark concreteness of everyday life meeting the challenges of new roles and rules and technologies, which demand on-the-spot pragmatic evaluation and assessment; on the other a language of continuity and development, which requires a collective memory, a belief in a group or in redefined though ever-elusive sociality. There is, at bottom, a trust in the regenerative power of dialectics.[40] In fact, the title of the essay, to comprehend, to modify, actually reads understanding as a dynamic process, cum-pre-hendere, a bringing together which already requires and effects change; and modificaton considered as autotransformation, self-directed modifications, using the implications of the reflexive ending to conceive of the modifying as subject-oriented as well as object-determined. In short, for Bodei, if only we had a genuine drive for "an education and a potentially permanent state of self-education,"[41] understanding itself would be the transforming voice [comprensione trasformatrice], which is creative. It follows that in this way the comprehension would not degenerate into blind alienating repetition or specialization, but would rather make of the results of reason "rational habits," and instill in the subject "an attitude toward observation, reasoning, a searching which

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40. See Bodei's article "Beyond Dialectical Thinking: Political Logics and the Construction of Individuality," in Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1985), pp. 123-40. In this issue there are also papers by Batimmo, "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought," pp. 151-64; Giorgio Agamben, "The Idea of Language; On Some Difficulties in Speaking about Language," pp. 141-50; and Mario Perniola, "The Difference of the Italian Philosophical Culture," pp. 103-16, which were read originally at a Symposium held at New York University, Nov. 3-5, 1983, titled The Unperfect Actor: Critique o Ideology and Hemeneutics in Contemporary Italian Thought.

41. Bodei in Crisi della ragione, p. 234.

vecomes a second nature." To conclude, there's a "crisis" if we insist on believing reason in somehow detached from empirical, changing social reality and is therefore out of play, perhaps useless. But if only we consider for a moment that reason is part and parcel with a social project, then the "crisis" is something positive, especially for an understanding which is also a conscious modifying of what's around us: If its procedures do not reach deep into the social subject and the institutions such that it can sustain anomalies, contradictions, darkness [...Weimar, Nazism...], the power of reason seems to end when we actually dominate something, so that no special dose of fortune of Providence or magic is required. These are the processes we do in fact understand [si comprendono], processes of a full rationality whic inspire a calm trust. If we do not succeed in preserving or increasing the number, the visivility, the extent, the connections among manageable processes [processi controllabili], if the problems which are accumulating in disturbing proportion are not directed toward a solution, it is likely that one may start to perceive an ailing sense of rationality. Trust and the credibility of "reason" are socially bound to the successes, influences or progress of reason. And of such trust reason in its turn is in dire need-much like the banking system-in order to go on. Reason indeed needs trust [fiducia] in order to go on.[42] It becomes then a question of wanting to remove the "resistances," and to seek "an understanding that wants to change and a transformation that wants to understand itself."

II

8. Responses to Gargani's anthology were not long in coming. I'll refer to three of them in order to draw some preliminary conclusions and introduce the third part of this study. Mario Vegetti observed that on the basis of these essays, it would seem that reason, rather than being in a crisis, is actually alive and well.[43] What's more, a certain style typically associated with "dominating rationality" (in the "strong" sense of the word, centered upon the values of truthfulness and the function of coherence, effectiveness, power and extension) not only did not crumble, at the purported origin-late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries-but actually succeeded in consolidating its own hegemonic structures (I take it Vegetti means sociopolitical, institutionalized structures). As a matter of fact, argues Vegetti, what else are Levi-Strauss' "rationalization" of anthropology, Lacan's "reasons of psychoanalysis," the legitimizing logic of neo-classical economics' approach to the ever-flowing energies of the market, and finally the rationalizing of neopositivist epistemology at the hands of Carnap and Lakatos, but evident proof that, though ther might be symptoms of uneasiness, reason is far from being ina crisis.[44] For Vegetti, Ginsburg's sapere indiziario cannot hope of supplanting hegemonic rationality (the two leading trunks mentioned above) because his radical style of inquiry "lacks" the "terrible power of abstraction," without which he feels no one can think and act according to the various levels of comprehension (with reference to values in general and truth-values in particular) and effectiveness (planning and projecting in a real-world order of events). And, he adds, without

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42. Ibid., p. 236.

43. Mario Vegetti, "The Power of Abstraction and the Knowledge of Subjects," in Aut-Aut, 175-76, gennaio, 1980, 5-18.

44. Ibid., p. 7.

abstraction, there's no Marx. We cannot therefore risk ending up like His Majesty's Bengali subjects, who found themselves spoken by a more powerful language (a language effecting power) with the only alternatives, in a way not too distant from Bodei's perception of the same phenomena, that although reason has at times become one of the articulations of power, it is not under its exclusive dominion or constitutes its sole instrument.

        Pier Aldo Rovatti, who co-edited with Vattimo Il pensiero debole (1983), remarks on the gaze turned downward, this direzione bassa of Ginsburg's analysis, which he considers something worthwhile exploring.[45] However, he also expresses doubts concerning Ginsburg's procedure, since it would mimic "high" reason: the predominantly mute knowledge furnished by the clue is read directly as a legitimate, decipherable semiotic system thus bridging, without much historical support, the gap between the sign as written and the sign as read and interpreted. For Rovatti what remains essential in this enquete is that the power of rational contradiction be conceived as capable of inhabiting previously inarticulate of unarticulated regions of subjectivity , and it is from there that a promising start can be hoped for.

        9. In his review titled "The Shadow of Neorationalism: Notes on Crisi della ragione,” Gianni Vattimo observes that we are still dealing with a family squabble, that the authors are once again debating from "within" the metaphysics of classical reason and that, had they not been so obdurate in their refusal to even consider the history of hemeneutics, many more fruitful hypotheses could have been so obdurate in their refusal to even consider the history of hermeneutics, many more fruitful hypotheses could have been advanced.[46] For Vattimo the main problem of the discussion is that, first of all, the discovery that reason can be a strategy-a procedure largely occupied with practical needs-does not necessarily mean that there are now several reasons, that reason multiplies itself. Likewise, and perhaps above all, insisting on the fact that multiple reasons have been identified does not necessarily mean that we can now understand reason "as strategy and interplay of forces." We have here two branches of Classical Reason each disputing the position of the other, but both convinced that one position can integrate the other. And it is the assumption of this translatability without residue that the authors do not address, for that would lead to the problem of language [linguaggio] (and not of the languages-lingue-of reason), of the Grund, of Difference itself, and it is no coincidence that the names of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Gadamer never appear, and Dilthey is mentioned only in passing.

        Vattimo isolates two camps: at one extreme, Vittorio Strada and his loyalty to dialectics, which allows him to address the problem of the many reasons as interplay between reality and rationality, an internal exchange which is merely its articulation. On the opposite side Franco Rella, who holds that forces are simply given as different procedures, idioms, pathways, logics, and that's that. The first position rehashes historicism, and thus propounds a principled ideal of harmony between the rational and the real; the second moves without any "mediation" (or "work of the negative") toward the variegated field of idioms or metalanguages, taking the multiplicity as nonproblematic. If this assessment of the situation is valid, either one does not accept in its full import the discovery that at the basis of reason (or reasons) there's an interplay of forces

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45. Pier Aldo Rovatti, "The Repositioning [dislocazione] of Contradiction and Individual Knowledge," in Aut-Aut, op. cit., pp. 27-40.

46. Gianni Vattimo, "The Shadow of Neorationalism," in Aut-Aut, op. cit., pp. 19-26.

(interests, passions, impulses, power); or else one does not want to acknowledge the destructuring effect this can have precisely because what is being explored is that link between knowledge and interest, and that possibility of an irreducible multiplicity of rational procedures. This critique does not come from the outside, says Vattimo, because already Marx had shown how the diversification of the procedures of reason was related to interest groups and power relations. At the same time, the positivist and analytical traditions have always excluded the problem of power and interest and oriented their efforts toward the multiplicity of language games. The result of not looking into the interim space, of not considering the question of truth and of language [linguaggio], entails the acceptance of multiple rationalities apt at consolidating established groups. To fend off the charge of irrationalism-which was important to all the thinkers represented in the Crisi-it is enough to acknowledge that language strategies are the pell-mell expression of specific forces, like interests, pulsions, and so on. This view opens reason to the realm of belief, as Viano has shown. The alternative position is to view these "strategies" of reason as the unfolding of a dialectic materialism as the essence of history, which is Strada's position. A third possibility would be represented by Bodei's attempt at a mediation between theory and praxis (derived from Freud and Gramsci), where strategy is seen as the affirmation of a harmony between the ego and the id such that the conflict modifies and achieves a peculiar coherence; but this requires that hte expressions of the new strategies (whether psychologically conflictual of not: Bodei employs Freud's theory as a model) be accounted for despite the fact that a hegemonic, self-legitimating idea of reason has been found inadequate. And here, according to Vattimo, Bodei must make recourse to a Hegelian matrix, albeit through Gramsci, positing the tenability of "an understanding which is a becoming present of the self, a knowing how to diligently enter the modifications that are going on."[47] Vattimo observes how Bodei's "transforming rationality" and idea of an "understanding which is a (self) transformation" comes very close to the hermeneutic position, but falls short because of its underlying Hegelianism, its pointing to a tautological glorification of the many ways of reason: thus, says Vattimo, we are not beyond the idea of rationality as the global horizon within which the single strategies exist. This only makes a case for a Marxism which considers science, utopia and emancipatory praxis as indissoluble, the very truth of Marxism. The real problem seems to be that we are still dealing with foundational thinking, with an attitude that bypasses the issues of intuition (for instance, in Ginsburg's essay) and of the capacity to know, and finally does not truly address the Verstehen, the end result being that we are still talking in terms of submitting new "paradigms." Without the full support of the hermeneutic tradition, says Vattimo, the questioning of the prerogatives of reason becomes a diatribe which cannot avoid either of two foundational "strategies": a self-renovating rationality that needs some type of historicism for support; and a rationality which is tautologically exalted for its capacity to usher in new techniques and languages (I take it Vattimo means "metalanguages": cf. idiomi molteplici). All of this is not unlike the opposition between Marxism and neoenlightenment of the fifties. Though it may not be the case that these ghost-chasing quarrels have totally exhausted what they had to say-Vattimo will take up, under a new perspective, Sartre's Critique of Dialectical Reason in his more recent writings[48]-neopositivist

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47. See Bodei's "To Comprehend, To Modify," in Crisi, pp. 229.

48. See the essay "Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought," mentioned in note 40, which is also the lead essay in Gianni Vattimo, Pier Aldo Rovatti, eds., Il pensiero debole (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1983), pp. 12-28. This will be explored in detail in part three of the present study.

science, Marxism and phenomenology (Veca, for instance) are yet engaged in grounding the experience of strategic reason in a materialistc historicism whose ultimate, albeit unacknowledge, foundation rests upon Classical Rationalism.

For Vattimo, it is the hermeneutic perspective which can provide some insights into the issues thus far discussed. Heidegger in particular has addressed the issue of a "beyond" or "somewhere" of language-without ignoring the questions of a "different" rationality, which concerns comprehension, deciphering, historical knowledge, and the analysis of the unconscious mind-but without accepting or even seeking a foudational solution, a metaphysical, teleological grounding. Moreover, says Vattimo, perhaps it is time to address the irreducible differences between the analytic perspective and the ontological perspective, despite the interesting (I should say challenging) attempts on the part of thinkers like K. O. Apel to configure a "merger" between the Nietzsche-Heidegger trunk and the Wittgenstein-Analytic Philosophy schools. The experience of the manifold does not in and by itself mean emancipation (much like the opposition reason-reasons does not simply coincide with the opposition truth-power), at least until hegemonic models [schemi] crumple. Moreover, the dissolution of the purported unity of the I [io] does not grant access to the other perspectives (to "Difference," we might even say) which cannot be reduced to a mere acknowledgment of the given differences, deploying them "iuxta propria principia with a certain technological fanaticism."[49]

10. If we now consider the terrain just explored from the perspective of interpretive discourse, it can readily be seen that whether it is good or bad, real or fake, a crisis of reason affects directly and immediately the method involved in research, extending its influence to the very language (better: metalanguage) required to explain itself logically or coherently. Questioning the statute of reason has made us aware that the methods of inquiry sanctioned by science and rationalist philosophies are living precarious lives, because though they can legitimately (that is, formally) guide the critic to a presupposed locus of knowledge, they cannot any longer pretend to extend their validity to other domains not formally (or "rationally") defined. Domains in which the linguistic and the existential moment precede the metalinguistic formulation.

Method (by which I mean here the methods of reason or rational methodologies) can be now regarded as a two-pronged, bilateral construct, a dichotomous-enabling structure, a rhetorically bifurcate figura: at one end, the socially and historically verifiable extensions and transformation, the how and the what of method (from utensils to multiplication tables to, in short, its becoming "instrument") have unquestionably affected reality and the social structure, making a "difference," so to speak, in very concrete terms, especially as it accepted and in turn shaped technological development. At the other end, this explication-turned-concretization has each and every time needed an explanatory rhetoric, a restricted vocabulary, a few concepts for the why things were what they were and why it couldn't be otherwise. It would be easy to assert at this point that we are dealing with a (theoretical and historical) case of bad conscience legitimizing the exploitation of the means of production and so on, but that is not what we are pursuing here, and would mean missing the point. Even the Marxian paradigm cannot do without a set of projective possibilities of realization (in the worst cases, utopias), which means that its method is articulated as praxis with constant (though often tactic) reference to an Ideal to

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49. Vattimo in Aut-Aut, op. cit., p. 25.

Come, a One or Truth, which ultimately is a theory of history, a theory of man. In other words, it too leans on theoria as ontological Grund, a (often mystifying) Transcendent Value or Idea.[50]

Rather, it is this indissoluble connection between method and theory that in fact emerges as a basic issue in the possibility of interpretation, and which needs further exploration. Method, we saw, can be understood as a set of procedures and patterns that lean on epistemology, how we know and what this knowledge is; theory, on the other hand, can be understood as principles or Grand View, God or Master Paradigm, from our perspective: (an idea of) the essence of being. And whereas method can have a more variegated and eventful existence, since as explication and enabling function of research and criticism it makes up the bulk of our written history (history of knowledge or cognitive claims), theory is in general less time-bound and in fact the majority of theories (especially in theology, philosophy, aesthetics, poetics) always preach ("predicate") from atemporal, eternal heights.[51] Vattimo's critique, for instance, can be seen as an appeal to scientific-minded or rationalist thinkers to reach out beyond the method(s) of reason and to reconceptualize instead its theoretical presuppositions, most of which will be found to speak, despite themselves, a foundational, metaphysical, "strong" type of language.

Paradoxically, rationalistic and scientific methods of inquiry require, by virtue of their formal internal exigencies, a belief in a contextual extra-rational or non-scientific dimension of existence.[52] In and by itself the method, the instrument, is nothing. If we make an effort to recover its co-originating world-view impulse, in short its theoretical matrix, then perhaps the "path" "in between" and "from...to" can be illuminated, and permit one to see that certain things are indeed there, but at the same time that other things, other pathways are, almost of necessity, left out in the shadows. Method as the expression of an idea of reason has, in Modern Times (since Galileo and Descartes), given sense to the expression "Return of the Same."[53] In this sense, dualistic, rationalistic, interpretive discourses are severely limited, because they still split

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50. Marxian and Marxist method(ology), and the historical and ontological claims it advances, are discussed in great detail in one of the central chapters of the announced Interpretive Thresholds (see note 2), with particular reference to the works of Marx, Labriola, Gramsci, Lukacs, Della Volpe, Goldman and Italian Marxist critics of the sixties and the seventies. For an assessment of the Crisi anthology in relation to Marxism and feminism, see Renate Holub, "Towards a New Rationality?" in Discourse, No. 4, 1982, pp. 89-106.

51. This is analyzed in depth in my forthcoming The Elusive Hermes (cf. n. 2).

52. From this to a reflection of the value and importance of Pragmatism for interpretive discourse the road is brief, especially as the notions of truth and meaning are ultimately grounded upon real consequence. Terms like concretization, effect (Wirkung) and consequence (esito in Italian) seem to lead parallel lives, and should spur research on the common concerns of Hermeneutics and Pragmatism. In particular, it is the dynamics between the idea and the fact (the reading and the writing, we might even say) of a great work that ought to be seen as the problem in interpretation, an in-between which appears as the intelligible horizon (containing idea and fact) as well as the totality of its possible articulation (ergo: rhetorics). Besides the above-quoted Rorty, see Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," in Philosophical Writings, pp. 23-24; H.S. Thayer "Pragmatism: A Reinterpretation of the Origins and Consequences," in Mulvaney and Zeltner, eds., Pragmatism: Its Sources and Prospects (Columbia, S.C.: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1981), pp. 1-20 But see also Part III of this study.

53. Parts I and II of The Elusive Hermes deal precisely with these questions.

up their "subjects," they continue to divide the world into twos, a plus function and a minus function, a "method" still operative in Francesco Orlando's reading of Freud.[54] A thorough analysis of the "crisis" of reason at the tail end of the Modern Era and its implications for interpretive discourse cannot be carried out unless we turn also in due time and place toward transcendental phenomenology, since there we find thematized-with the rigors of a transcedental logic, the epoche, and dialectic-all the areas that rationalist philosophy and scientific thought have systematically excluded: history, aesthetics, politics, arts and literature, consciousness, language [linguaggio], existence, values.[55] In Italy, at least, this constitutes a most impotant chapter, since the Kant-Husserl tradition as interpreted by Antonio Banfi was among the first to oppose any serious resistance to the idealist-historicist cultural hegemony of Croce and Gentile, becoming in fact a major trunk of philosophy for a short period until the mid-sixties.[56] But that

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54. Francesco Orlando, "Enlightenment Rhetoric and Freudian Negation," in Crisi della ragione, pp. 127-45. See his Toward a Freudian Theory of Literature (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978 [1973]), pp. 3-7, 123-36 et infra. This and other psychocriticisms are discussed in Interpretive Thresholds (see note 2). It can be asserted that the structural-linguistic approach to Freudian psychology, which counted legions in the sixties and through the seventies in France, Italy and the United States, especially in literary criticism, still exhibited a dualistic, oppositional, rational architecture which historically goes back to Locke. For Joseph F. Rychlak, The Psychology of Rigorous Humanism (New York: Wiley, 1977), the possibilities of a theory-method relation can and must be expanded if only we deploy, next to the "winning" Lockean model or "paradigm," Kantian "telic" formulations and "theories"! Indeed, I feel we must expand even beyond the Kantian paradigm (modern structuralism has also deep roots in neo-Kantian thought, as we read in G. Puglisi, Che cosa e la strutturalismo [Roma: Astrolabio, 1970], pp. 63-81), as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Lacan and others have suggested.

55. I am speaking of areas of interest or disciplines that are crucial to interpretive discourse and to literary interpretation in particular, each of which can make a legitimate claim to its own history, its own special metalanguage and system of cultural codes. When we interpret a passage from Dante's Commedia, as when we assess the relative value of a recent best-seller with a group of students, that refer invariably to the tradition of the work, to wether it is good (or "beautiful"!), if it has any political message (and some still argue, belated decadents, that politics doesn't matter to art), what the author "meant," ergo the intentional consciousness of a person (perhaps long dead), finally the author's (and, for the raffinati, the text's) social life and fortune, and what value to attribute to it. Now all this is fine and hermeneutically coherent, except that we cannot in each of these instances adopt a scientific method whose statements, or grid of valid operations, condition the very possibility of the articulation: Just think of the apparently unrelated contributions of Husserl and Heisenberg! Interpretation, literary criticism, must be able to speak to and of the work in question, and that means an alignment along paths and channels not always, or not necessarily derived from (and then slavishly adhered to) the hard sciences or from "official" rationalism. As the old Stilkritik knew well, a critic has to be a historian, a linguist, a philosopher and a "scientist." (As late as 1947 Gianfranco Contini exhorted his humanist colleagues to go out and study, also, the methods of biology, the discoveries of the sciences, and learn "rigorous, scientific" thinking and methods of research. I should simply like to add that, ironically, by the sixties literary critics seemed to know only scientific models of research and interpretation.

56. In the early 1930s there forms a "Milan School" of philosophy under the teaching of Antonio Banfi, who had done earlier studies whith and on the neo-Kantian school, Husserl as well as Simmel. Among the "banfiani," very important and influential were Enzo Paci, Giulio Preti, Dino Formaggio and Luciano Anceschi.

would require a separate study. For now, it appears that after the great late nineteenth-early twentieth century foundation-shattering "crisis," Reason (and, with it, therefore, rational methods of inquiry) has evolved, especially in the last twenty years or so, into "strategies"[57] "modes," "statements about the observed regularities."[58]

III

11. If the <u>Crisis of Reason</u> made us aware of the uncertainty and lability of scientific and epistemological constructs, <u>Weak Thought</u> brings to the foreground the limits and dilemmas of ontology and of Western metaphysical thinking in general.[59] And just as some of the philosophers in the <u>Crisis</u> book attempted nonetheless to recover from the debris of Reason trapped intuitions and unnoticed stylemes in view of a "positive" or at any rate "rehabilitating" notion of reason(s)-and therefore of method(s)-so in the <u>Weak Thought</u> anthology, for every damaging blow to the foundations and towers of Metaphysics, an equal amount of care is devoted to rethinking and reshaping the question of mankind's essential being. However, this means the terrain to be explored is of a totally different nature; namely, we are now dealing with ontology, not with epistemology. In the context of this study, the link between the two groups of readings is not historiographic in the strict sense-though some connections will suggest themselves-but rather emblematic, aiming at a crossing over, an interference, a repositioning of the question of interpretation. How is this to be understood? Let us backtrack a moment.

We began by stating that interpretive discourse-and, more specifically, critical "methods"-cannot be "properly" or "authentically" articulated without taking into account their "theoretical" presuppositions. We saw how approaches to a text (or to facts, processes, etc.) that bank heavily on rational-scientific methods of inquiry are mired in a general crisis; that is, they can no longer make universal claims to truth, nor can they ignore some extramethodical, non-scientific referents under risk of being demagogic or mystifying. We also saw how the theoretical, which here is made to coincide with metaphysical presuppositions, kept on surfacing, manifesting its linguistic <u>qua</u> linguistic (i.e., "rhetorical") nature, and how only a very loose, local and "consciously instrumental" ideal of reason has any viable use in the technological epoch. The "connection" with perspectives that originate in the "theoretical" or the "metaphysical" (a move that could rightly be considered improper, illegitimate, or disrupting from the point of view of rationalist philosophy or the philosophy of science) is motivated by an argument parallel to the observation made by Vattimo above concerning the total disregard on the part of deconstructors of classical reason for the hermeneutic perspective, which had already

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57. "Strategies" is to be understood more in terms of Wittgenstein than of Derrida, whose influence in Italy is very limited.

58. Ervin Laszlo, <u>Introduction to Systems Philosophy</u> (New York: Harper, 1972), p. 16.

59. Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti, eds. <u>Il pensiero debole</u>, op cit. The contributins to the volume, besides those by the editors, are by Leonardo Amoroso, Gianni Carchia, Giampiero Comolli, Fillipo Costa, Franco Crespi, Alessandro Dal Lago, Umberto Eco, Maurizio Ferraris, and Diego Marconi. An English translation of this book is forthcoming from Johns Hopkins University Press. As was the case with the <u>Crisi</u> book, given the diversity, range and breadth of themes and authors contained in <u>Weak Thought</u>, I will focus only on certain areas germane to my argument. All translations are my own; citations/references are to the Italian edition and will be indicated in my text by page number.

dealt with some of the same problems. In fact, the thinkers of the second book are concerned with metaphysical issues from the vantage point of a general theory of being. But they do so by critiquing from the inside, as it were, the very notions of metaphysics, theory, truth. As a parallel inquiry to Crisis of Reason, the Weak Thought anthology could also have been called Crisis of Metaphysics. The difference is that, whereas in the first book philosophers explore and critique the heritage of (Modern) Reason, offering little-with a few exceptions[60]-by way of alternatives, in the second book the "crisis" is a "given" from which to take off on a variously articulated path called "weak ontology." We are, however, on the other side of the theory-method relation postulated at the beginning; we are talking from a terrain Crisis of Reason left untouched or did not address adequately. With reference to our framework, we need to look into a) how "weak ontology" deals with the interconnected issues of a no longer tenable model of classical-i.e., metaphysical, logocentric-reason; b) how it adresses the problem of being and with it the question of theory; and c) how this affects interpretation as a whole.

      12. Paradoxically, the thinker who furnishes us with some preliminary steps toward a re-positioning of interpretive discourse is Umberto Eco. I say "paradoxically" because, up to 1975, just four years before Crisis of Reason came out, Eco's work would have been considered the ultimate exemplum of what a coherent, "strong," rationalistic approach to knowledge is like. His Trattato di semiotica generale[61] is fundamentally a summa centered on the sign and the code, aimed at explaining all systems of communication and signification. Its real and ideal precursors are Aristotle, Aquinas, Locke, Peirce and Morris. This is the Eco of epistemological closure, the "closed" systems of comprehension. In his review of Crisis of Reason,[62] Eco still propounds the instance of the modus ponens as the minimal enabling position from which to articulate any discourse on knowledge as well as "belief" in that knowledge. But during those years he also explores and expands the posibilities of the two external poles of the communicative-signifying chain, that is, the sender and the receiver. Thus, what in the Trattato was postulated as "model Q,"[63] the "interaction of codes and the message as open form,"[64] and, in terms of signic production, the "continuum of transformations,"[65] in his subsequent book, Lector in fabula,[66] is

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60. I am thinking in particular of the work of Aldo Gargani, Remo Bodei and Salvatore Veca.

61. Umberto Eco, Trattato di semiotica generale (Milano: Bompiani, 1975); English version, A Theory of Semiotics (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976). It must be said, however, that prior to his work on semiotics (formerly: semiology), Eco had already developed a flexible, "open," non-dogmatic approach to interpretation in Opera Aperta (Milano: Bompiani, 1962), which was informed at the same time by Pareyson's aesthetics, phenomenology, Riegi's notion of Kunstwollen and information theory.

62. Translated and republished in Umberto Eco, Travels in Hyper Reality (New York: Harcourt, 1986).

63. Cf. Trattato, 2.12, pp. 173-77. Also, the notion of "Global Semantic Space ['System' in the English version]," 2.13, pp. 178-182.

64. Ibid., 2.15, pp. 196-200.

65. Ibid., 3.6.9, pp. 320-24 et infra.

further developed in terms of "unlimited semiosis,"[67] and in general-despite the recurrence analytic, empirical and isotopic models-towards a pragmatic and vaguely more "hermeneutic" approach. We might say that the Stable (predictable and normalizing) Dictionary Semantics of the world is making room for an Unstable (rhyzomatic, historical) Encyclopedia Semantics. This is evident in <u>Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio</u>,[68] which devotes ample space to "sign and inference," Peircian "abduction," and the problem of the symbol. There's a hint of developments to come at the end of the first chapter, where Eco writes: "The preliminary condition of the sign is not therefore that it can be substituted (<u>aliquid stat pro aliquo</u>), but that it can yield a possible <u>interpretation</u>."[69] In a sense, he moving away from Hjelmslev and Morris and working his way back to Peirce's idea of the interpretant, reopening the nature of the dichotomous sign to a trichotomy, one of the "included middle," so to speak.[70] Subsections from Chapter Two of <u>Semiotica</u>, which dealt with "Dictionary versus Encyclopedia," with the addition of a short introductory piece on "strong" semantic models and a concluding one on labyrinths, appear as the third essay in the <u>Weak Thought</u> anthology.

The essay explores why a "strong" form of knowledge organization, such as a dictionary, is "theoretically" doomed from the start, and why an encyclopedia-type of semantics is more likely to account for a real-world context of signification. The argument rests on a critique of the premise, typical of axiomatic, hierarchic models like Chomsky's or Katz and Fodor's, according to which it is possible to construct a model language with a definite set of synonymic possibilities which would account, through homology, for an infinite number of possibilities present in natural languages. This type of semantics deploys the same logic that the authors of <u>Crisis of Reason</u> decried as insufficient, authoritarian, delimiting. On the other hand, an encyclopedia-type of semantics undermines the very possibility of the ideal dictionary. The encyclopedia is governed by the Peircian principle of interpretation and by unlimited semiosis; it is not concerned with the object itself as much as with the content, which is ever interpretable. As a result, it constitutes a "weak" semantic model because "it subsumes the rules of signification to the continuous determination of context and circumstance...and incorporates pragmatics" (75). We cannot dwell here on Eco's analysis of Porphyry's <u>Isagoge</u>,[71] and must proceed to his final assessment:

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66. Unberto Eco, <u>Lector in fabula; la cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi</u> (Milano: Bompiani, 1979). The English version includes other essays and bears the just as symptomatic title of <u>The Role of the Reader</u> (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1979).

67. <u>Ibid</u>., 2.8, pp. 44-46, et infra. Cf. also "Introduzione," pp. 8-9.

68. Umberto Eco, <u>Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio</u> (Torino: Einaudi, 1984); English translation, <u>Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language</u> (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984).

69. <u>Ibid</u>., I. 13, p. 51.

70. Cf. also article in this issue for the active role of the reader in textual sign production. Pragmatics is a terrain where semiotics and hermeneutics meet.

71. Here Eco demonstrates how even such a paradigmatic text on the problem of definitions, which would have all the trimmings of a "strong" axiomatic and hierarchical idea of reason behind it, is ultimately undermined from the inside and deals only with "differences" and "accidents" originating not

The encyclopedia does not furnish us with a complete model of <u>rationality</u> (it does not reflect in a univocal way an ordered universe), rather, it supplies rules of <u>reasonableness</u>, that is to say, rules that allow us to decide at every step the conditions that warrant the use of language in order to make sense [<u>rendere ragione</u>]-according to some provisional criterion of order-of a disordered world (or a world whose ordering criteria escape us).(75) [emphasis in original]

This position allows Eco to recover, among contemporary theories of interpretation, the value of the rhyzomatic approach for, in fact, with it "one gives only local descriptions" (78); moreover, one is now able to cast a backward glance at history and view the Enlightenment not so much (or any longer) as the triumph of <u>rationality</u> but as the paradigm of "weak thought" itself, a thought of <u>reasonableness</u>.

  Therefore, insofar as interpretation relies on approaches inspired by rhyzomes, encyclopedias and labyrinths (as networks), it stakes out territory for a thought whose claims must be conjectural and contextual. Moreover, it must somehow make room for some unspecified will, conscience or drive because we saw that thought strives for a reasonableness that monitors intersubjectivity in order to avoid yielding either to skepticism or to solipsism (79). We can then say that all these cognitive-interpretive models partake, and represent prime examples, of "weak thought" (though still coming from the rational and epistemological-i.e., methodic-side of the theory-method equation).

  13. Behind Gianni Vattimo's notion of "weak ontology" there's a long excursus into and reflection on the several possibilities disclosed to thinking in the wake of Nietzsche and Heidegger, to whom he has constantly returned to for the past twenty-five years. Of particular interest to us in this context are some of the essays contained in <u>Le avventure della differenza</u>,[72] in which Vattimo analyzes and critiques Gadamer, Derrida and Deleuze, proceeds to read Nietzsche as the philosopher of difference), and finally sketches the possibility of thought which effects a "de-grounding" [<u>sfondamento</u>] with respect to the history of being, a necessary gesture to pave the way for weak ontology.

  Concerning Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics, Vattimo observes how several of its tenets are really metaphysical, "strong" and totalizing. The claim "being that can be understood is language," for instance, ignores or recuctively appropriates two areas whech Heidegger had merely pinpointed as <u>problems</u>: namely, the unresolvef relationship between revealing/covering up in the history of being, and the difficulty of handling the copula. In Gadamer these are resolved in the description of the structures of being and implanted in a theory of the structure of human existence to whose finitude there corresponds the infinity of the process of interpretation (36-38). But this raises another two-pronged issue, for if the problem of historical malaise (as

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in formal substance, but in real-world knowledge, in extra-rational, or extra-methodic territory. Cf. pp. 70-73.

72. Gianni Vattimo, <u>Le avventure della differenza; che cosa significa pensare dopo Nietzsche e Heidegger</u> (Milano: Garzanti, 1980). I will be referring mainly to the essays "Ragione ermeneutica e ragione dialettica," pp. 15-43; "Nietzsche e la differenza," pp. 71-94; "An-denken. Il pensare e il fondamento," pp. 123-49; and "Le avventure della differenza," pp. 151-71.

sketched by Nietzsche) consists in the rupture between theory and praxis, ontological hermeneutics does not overcome it by positing the coincidence of being and language (or: being = language), because this presupposes a continnum-albeit subject to ever-different interpretations-of a stable structure, in effect rehabilitating the Hegelian (and in some ways Diltheyian) paradigm of the itself and the for itself that governs the phenomenology of history, and the strict coincidence between doing and knowing, praxis and theory. Thus the overcoming of metaphysics becomes a new canonization of history in which the pure passing of what is inessential entails, ultimately, the non-coincidence between existence and meaning (40). The second horn of the problem concerns the fact that in the formula "being that can be understood is language," there's no room for an idea of language which is <u>also</u> a pure instrument of communication, sign that need decipherment. In an excess of zeal, Gadamer's anti-positivist thrust in <u>Truth and Method</u> makes being the sole and universal task of hermeneutics. Yet the fact remains, Vattimo writes, that

> the Western tradition has handed down, at least as its most recent consequence, a conception of language as sign understood in its effective capacity to refer "objectively," lending itself to an experience which is above all a decipering. (37)

It follows then that ontological hermeneutics as a general theory of interpretation based on the experience of the finitude of man does little to account for those "inessential" aspects which do not conform to the requirement of being=language, and leans heavily towards metaphysics, towards grounding principles, leaving concrete facts, signs, praxis itself in oblivion. As ulterior proof, Vattimo observes how Gadamer offers little in the way of "methodical" indications to assess the values of the actual expressions which are typically recognized as embodying the linguisticalness of being.[73]

The way toward post-metaphysical thought is to be sought in the space between theory and praxis-we might say, in line with our theme, <u>between theory and method</u>-a way which would allow for a reconceptualization of the issue in terms of experience. Only Nietzsch, Sartre[74] and Heidegger seem to have pointed towards new horizons. The questions the philosopher asks in concluding this essay address the tasks he perceives as crucial to our epoch:

> Is it possible to have historical action that bears from the start its meaning, without the threat of the inertia of counterfinality? Is it possible to have interpretation, or living with symbols, that is dance and play as in Zarathustra, and not permanent resurgence of the transcendence of meaning, erring, exercise in finitude? Is it possible to have production of symbols not based on the repression-sublimation structure? Is it possible-in this light-to overcome metaphysics? (43)

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73. This problem is amply treated in my forthcoming <u>The Elusive Hermes</u>; cf. note 2. Owing to lack of space, I have left out Vattimo's "positive" assessment of other aspects of ontological hermeneutics.

74. Vattimo refers to the Sartre of <u>The Critique of Dialectical Reason</u> in which is postulated the necessity to think of a coincidence between experience and history, but where the latter is not seen as malaise. Sartre recurs frequently in Vattimo's recent writings.

It shouldn't be overly difficult, given these premises, to foresee how the "thought of difference," associated with Derrida and Deleuze, falls short of the mark posted by the questions. Without getting into Vattimo's textual critique, we learn that the unnameable "difference" between being and beings is continually swallowed up by the effective differences that constitute the chain of signifiers, revealing it as simulacre. The play involved in deconstructive maneuvers in search for the traces exposes the undecideables-pharmakon, supplement, hymen, differance itself and others-which, on the one hand, do not correspond to an originary fractured structure, being ultimately the product of an arbitrary choice, a toss of the Mallarmean dice that sets them up as opposites without foundations, while on the other this locus of difference is a non-place, pure trace of an original that cannot ever be given or named, making the undecidable itself something more than opposition: it turns into an insurmountable dead end. The reult is endless, almost delirious substitution and, as such, a critique which "makes no difference." We are left with no option other than to accept the destiny of gnawing away at the margins of the metaphysical text, rewriting it in a contemplative, parodistic mode. Yet parody is the only way of "making difference" in a situation in which any differentiation is always only a process of duplication of the trace, where in short the absolutization of difference has removed any possibility of differentiation. But, Vattimo observes, "parody is defined only as a position of consciousness, which is a classic element of the metaphysical armor of the thought of presence" (157-58). There is in these two thinkers a metaphysical congealment of the notion of difference which displays itself in stark counterposition to Heidegger's ontological difference as the happening or event of being and its historicity:

> [if] difference as archstructure is ouside of history, and does not happen...then in
> this aspect it once again represents a return to the most classical qualifying trait of
> metaphysical thought, namely, eternity (the fact that we are dealing with the eternity
> of the trace, or a non-homogeneous eternity marked by unfulfillable absence, does
> not constitute an alternative element with respect to metaphysics). (158)

The critique of Deleuze follows similar lines: a philosophy of difference that glorifies the duplication of the simulacre on the basis of an unrestrained libido, a "body without organs," can be traced back to a Bergsonian vitalism which is forever repeating variations of the several levels that make life possible.[75] What is left unthematized, says Vattimo, is Heidegger's _Wesen_ as always already _Ereignis_ of a differential relation between being and beings: to name the difference means "to think difference as difference"[76] not as a repetitive act of consciousness. The fear that by calling difference ontological difference is to situate it again in metaphysics is misplaced, for it leads to emptying difference of any content and ultimately to making it irrelevant:

> If we are not dealing with a difference between being and beings, we are left with
> a pure and simple-and metaphysical- affirmation of the non-homogeneity of what

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75. See also Vattimo's comments on Deleuze's "strong" and "affirmative" philosophical underpinnings in _Al di la del soggetto_, op cit., p. 43.

76. The obvious reference is to Heidegger's _Identity and Difference_.

metaphysics calls real, one, being. This non-homogeneity-which differentiates, confers, displays itself-is given once and for all. Confronted by it, the only thing that can change is the attitude of consciousness: rather than assuming being as homogeneous, it becomes a question of deconstructing it. But deconstructing does not partake of difference, which, as archstructure, is always already displayed and available. (162).

The status of Deleuzean deconstruction is therefore, according to Vattimo, again in line with speculative, representational thought, grounded in the correspondence between being and thought.

This brief parenthesis was necessary to avoid confusing ontological hermeneutics, deconstruction and weak thought. How should the ontological difference be thought, then? And does it have an effect on interpretation? According to Vattimo, we must turn to what Heidegger called "An-denken, rememoration, recalling, memory: "An-denken is the thought which, insofar as it recalls difference, recalls being" (163). Vattimo insists that such a recalling shifts the emphasis on the way being-there relates to difference, and as such involves man, "concerns him in the Brauch, in the usage[77] with which Heidegger translates Anaximander's chreon" (163).[78] But usage is essentially "the distribution of presencing into disorder. Usage conjoins the distribution."[79] More than that, in this notion of "usage" there is implied a different type of hermeneutics, for what is handed down "is in each case given in its while in unconcealment."[80] If we link this observation with other passages from Vattimo's works[81]-for instance, his

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77. See M. Heidegger, Early Greek Thinking, trans. D. F. Krell and F. A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), pp. 48-55.

78. Ibid.: "To use' ...suggests: to let something present come to presence as such; frui, to brook, to use, usage, means: to hand something over to its own essence and to keep it in hand, preserving it as something present....Usage delivers what is present to its presencing, i.e. to its lingering. Usage dispenses to what is present the portion of its while. The while apportioned in each case to what lingers rests in the jointure which joins what is present in the transition between twofold absence (arrival and departure). The jointure of the while bounds and confines what is present as such" (53). However, as "dispenser of portions of jointure," usage conjoins order and reck, thus establishing boundaries which are not to be understood as de-limiting or as distinguishing between concrete states or entities. For "as to creon it is therefore at the same time apeiron, that which is without boundary, since its essence consists in sending boundaries of the while to whatever lingers awhile in presence" (54). The value of this for a thought of difference which, not oblivious to Being, yet intends to be rooted in its historicity, is clear: it paves the way for an understanding of the temporal Da-sein as what the later Heidegger calls Ereignis, event, the 'taking place' of the disclosure of Being.

79. Ibid., p. 54.

80. Ibid., p. 55.

81. See especially Al di la del soggetto, pp. 27-50, where, in commenting on a fragment from 1885-87 in which Nietzsche speaks of the interpreter's self-transcending task, Selbstverneinen, Sichselbstueberwinden, and of the necessity to act, even while "experimenting" interpretation, according to some however negligible normative criterion, Vattimo writes: "It is true that the rigidity of

underscoring in the writings of Nietzsche the decline of subjectivity[82] and the necessity to rethink the Zarathustrian <u>Uebermensch</u> as an "ever in becoming" "man of the beyond"[83]-we begin to see the emergence of a post-metaphysical "weak thought." Let me add that elsewhere Vattimo speaks of the "play" involved in interpretation, suggesting that cognizance of a certain "tolerance" between systems and networks of signs and sign codes, a "flexibility" which permits precisely for a "lingering" and "usage," as we saw above.

What takes shape before us is a notion of interpretation informed by several conceptual referents none of which is "founding," <u>Gründliche</u> and therefore totalizing. Moreover, these elements are not hierarchically organized, but constitute rather a loosely drawn map of intellective vectors. Reading a text means relating oneself to it, and any knowledge to be gathered cannot be translated by means of a single method and/or according to one general grammar. Reading a text on the basis of a logos erring through the concretions of time (monuments, ornament, canonic texts, specific traditions) means being aware of an existential capacity which has not been fully realized. As we read in the essay "Dialectics, Difference, and Weak Thought," with reference to Heidegger's <u>Vom Wesen der Wahrheit</u>, a weak ontology holds fast to the belief that verification and stipulation of the truth always take place in a freeflowing interplay among people, cultures, languages, generations, and on the basis of which we can say

> no one ever begins from zero, but always already from trust, belonging, bonds. The <u>rhetorical</u> horizon of truth (which we can call hermeneutical as well) is constituted in this free yet "impure" way, similarly to the common sense Kant speaks of in the <u>Critique of Judgement</u>. It is the bonds, the manners, the personal ties that make up the substance of <u>pietas</u>. This inscribes, together with a rhetorical "history" of logic or "weak" truth, the basis for a possible ethic in which the supreme values-those that serve as good in themselves, not with regard to anything else-are the symbolic formations, the monuments, the traces of the living (everything that spurs interpretation; an ethic of "goods" before an ethic of "imperatives." (26)

And here we can close in on three important, distinctive traits. Any epistemological claim is undestood also as a "linguistic" articulation, as a rhetorical fact.[84] It is possible to trace a "history" of being by addressing the gaps and the ruptures which we can experience with art,[85]

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communication codes, and of any type of code, has long been necessitated by the needs of the organization of labor. This rigidity, today, can be slackened, for we have already witnessed the death of God and the fall of every metaphysical structure of the universe" (46).

82. See on this topic his recent paper, "The Problem of Subjectivity from Nietzsche to Heidegger," in <u>Differentia</u> 1 (Autumn 1986), pp. 5-22.

83. <u>Al di la del soggetto</u>, op. cit., p. 38.

84. See the essay "Verità e retorica nell'ontologia ermeneutica" in <u>La fine della modernità; Nichilismo ed ermeneutica nella cultura post-moderna</u> (Milano: Garzanti, 1985), pp. 138-52.

85. See Vattimo's essays on the avant-gardes in his <u>Poesia e ontologia</u> (Milano: Mursia, 1984).

and it is also possible to understand the thought of dialectics and of difference as two distinct though not radically different manifestations of the decline of being in the age of technology.[86]

In order to see how it all comes together, we must introduce one more important term from Vattimo's vocabulary: <u>Verwindung</u>. With this term, which he retrieves and develops from a Heidegger text,[87] Vattimo establishes certain tenets which go into making a weak ontology. The category of "overcoming" is the fruit and destiny of what we call the Modern; it cannot be "thought" of as capable of bringing us into the postmodern. Predicated under the sign of the <u>novum</u>, fiercely deductive about its undemonstrable origins and the existence of a superior truth, "overcoming" as <u>Ueberwindung</u> must now be declined through the thought of difference. In this fashion, dialectics would experience the lability of the ideas of eternity, as well as dismiss the pretextuos right to accede to the <u>ontos on</u>. It would open up to the abyss which makes re-calling the only viable direction for thought to take. But here my own metaphors are already sketching the picture. Thought must take a path, and this path is demarcated by the language of beings that have been, by humans who <u>existed</u>. If the foundation is no longer there, we are not necessarily doomed to sink into void irreal. It is all a question of taking the notions of God, Truth, and other immutables as words, as points of view, as Nietzsche revealed. And it is all a question of acknowledging the cogency of Heidegger's claim that thought can only err and wander but cannot ever hope of "leaving metaphysics behind." What we are left with are the monuments, the "works" (the <u>opere</u>), and the linguistic heritage of attempts at overcoming. Heidegger's use of <u>Verwindung</u> suggests "acceptance" and "deep reflection," which is closely tied to his notion of thinking as <u>An-denken</u>, recalling, rememoration, as we saw above. To this Vattimo now adds the full range of other meanings possible in German, which include the ideas of recovery (as from an illness, convalescence) and distortion.[88]

Weak ontology is thus not a thought of metaphysics in a particular crisis, to which carefully contrived strategies can submit a solution or an alternative. Analogously to Derridian deconstruction,[89] but obviously on a different track, it holds that there's no getting out of <u>this</u>

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86. Vattimo claims that in the twentieth century, dialectics has developed "a dissolutive tendency which the dialectical scheme cannot control any longer: this tendency is perceivable in Benjamin's micrology, in Adorno's negativity and in Bloch's utopism" (17).

87. Vattimo writes that the term <u>Verwindung</u> appears once in <u>Holzwege</u> and in <u>Vortrage und Aufsatze</u>, but is developed (especially with reference to Heidegger's <u>Ueberwinden</u>) in <u>Identitat und Differenz</u>. See his full analysis in "Nichilismo e postmoderno in filosofia" contained in <u>La fine della modernita</u>, op. cit., pp. 172-89.

88. This notion is hermeneutically related to the idea of historicity as transmission, <u>Ueberlieferung</u>, of messages which are always already "interpretation." As such, they are "twisted" or "distorted" each and every time they are "recalled" by the interpreter. This perspective, explored elsewhere by Vattimo with reference to Gadamer, can serve as a bridge to a fruitful dialogue with Reception Theory, especially as regards the notion of <u>Wirkungsgeschichte</u>.

89. Of the authors in the anthology, Maurizio Ferraris, "The Aging of the School of Suspicion," pp. 120-36, writes of the similarities between deconstruction and weak ontology in view of the "parasitic double bind" between grammatology and metaphysics. On Derrida's critical reception, especially in Italy, see also by Ferraris, "Derrida 1975-1985. Sviluppi teorici e fortuna filosofica," <u>Nuova Corrente</u> 3 (1984), pp. 351-78.

form of thinking (basically: Hellenism and Judeo-Christianity). It acknowledges the historical existence of canons and events of thought but primarily as <u>something that has been lived</u> which can only be addressed in the second degree, so to speak, because there's an existential-experiential component to being which is pointed forward in time. And the thematic of "being-towards-death" runs through other writings of Vattimo, and occasionally of Carchia, Rovatti and Comolli as well. In this light, it cannot but understand in a distanced, partial and necessarily "impure" fashion. Thus thinking also recognizes the partiality and transitoriness of that "nextness" of the living human which, however, now essays to be heard. Among its traits, in fact, we must include it being a thought of fruition, of re-living, of aesthetic experience, and not of the "new," the emancipatory, and the superior. Weak thought is a thought of "contamination" which is the direct result of the <u>Verwindung</u>: resignation means also to resign, to mark off with an "other" new sign something which has been handed down and which confronts us. And finally, weak thought is informed by the <u>Ge-Stell</u>, the "enframing" or "im-position"[90] of the technological reality of the West which is nevertheless always on the verge of disclosing the <u>Ereignis</u>, the event of being.[91] The importance attributed to the temporality of the present means that, from a hermeneutic perspective, the discourse of science and technology is actually more important than the celebrative and reassuring humanism of the past. "Weak thought...no longer has reason to lay claim to the sovereignty which metaphysical thought claimed with respect to praxis" (26-27). The possibilities of theory are reduced to a less anxious and localized field in continuous flux and mutation, while the range of critical methods is made to coincide with the rhetorical reality of their transmission.

       14. Weak thought is also a learning disposition, <u>atteggiamento conoscitivo</u> as Rovatti calls it (42), but it should not be considered one way of knowing among others, or that it is "epistemological": its disposition, its attitude invests the entirety of experience. The attack on "strong thought" is directed spedifically at the speculative correspondence between the knower and the known. What Nietzsche had advocated, however, was the possibility of losing oneself, of rolling away from the center towards an <u>x</u>. Drawing on the thought of Michel Serres, our identity as subject is to be sought in the movement, the going around, <u>randonnee</u>, reconquering a sensitivity to, and a sensibility for, chaos, chance, risk. A weak ontology requires, according to Rovatti, that notions of "subject" and "object" be loosened from normative and universally valid moorings and be set afloat as if in "exile,"[92] fully aware of the dynamics between chance and necessity. For Rovatti the "eternal recurrence" itself is nothing more than another "necessity." To try to keep it in abeyance means to bend and suffer under its iron laws. But if we work it from the inside, if we face up to its existence, then the nothingness which constitutes us is not longer a threat. For now we can say something about it. The same holds for chance: we can refrain from acting before its horrible unpredictability, but we can also think of it as a flux, a game which can occupy us immensely if we decide to "figure out" its rules.

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90. This is Vattimo's suggestion for the Italian version, <u>imposizione</u>, which I think works in English as well.

91. See also <u>La fine della modernita</u>, op. cit., pp. 34 and 179.

92. Rovatti's specific reference here is to Lacan's seminar from 1972-73, <u>Encore</u>, in which he speaks of love as "the encounter of two exhiled traces." Cf. pp. 39-40. See also his <u>La posta in gioco</u> (Milano: Bompiani, 1987).

There's a strain of nihilism that binds this to most of the other essays in the book, an "active' nihilism responsible for the emergence of a philosophical consciousness or ideology which takes notions such as the transvaluation of all values, the absence of metaphysical foundations, and the dynamics of localized phenomena as a reaching out towards greater horizons of action and legitimation[93] seriously enough to inform the very possibility of thinking. For Alessandro Dal Lago and Franco Crespi, for example, nihilism and the indeterminacy that belie the discourse of ethics and social theory are the starting point for any articulation which, in attempting to situate and exercise its limited and personal freedom, cannot at any time ignore the rules of social comportment and the masked tendencies to absolutization which prompted the very possibility of a manifold presence, a real threat to anyone who espouses the cause of eternity.[94]

As for the other essays, each is dialogically engaged with the thought of a particular author,[95] in what may appear as an instictive reflex to find and consecrate precursors. But the overall picture points to a set of conditions that alter radically the status of literary hermeneutics and interpretation in general. Above all, I believe, is the valorization of writing and making/doing literature as a social and political act no less tangible and true than the institutionally legitimated discourses that gravitate towards the sciences, mathematics, philosophy itself in its broadest sense. The contribution by Comolli is in fact a "new" type of literary criticism, one informed by both a phenomenological-ontological inquiry and an aesthetic and poetic sublimation of creation and invention, that is to say, by writing <u>as if</u> a Writer, and <u>responding</u> to an artist. Since it is informed not by grammatology byt by the thought of difference, it deals with and speaks to the very issue of language and understanding, without playing metonymic and parodistic games.[96] It is a reading of a Kafkan text triggered by a real-life experience in which the coincidence of certain conditions flashed by the mind-by "memory," Comolli writes-an image of K. through the snow at dusk. Though one might say Comolli's "style" is Heideggerian, the essay does not begin with a poetic or "philosophic" question, but with a concrete and minute real-life detail which is then inscribed into a philosophical reflection on time, transposition, figures, and the linguisticalness of experience. It has transformed criticism into a philosophical novella.

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93. Rovatti has written extensively on the social, political and psychoanalytical aspects of these dynamics.

94. Cf. A. Dal Lago, "The Ethics of Weakness: Simone Weil and Nihilism," pp. 91-119; and F. Crespi, "Absence of Foundations and Social Project," pp.243-59.

95. For instance, a close reading of Hegel (the <u>Logic</u>) by G. Carchia, "In Praise of Appearance," pp. 81-90; a Heideggerian reading of Heidegger through Virgil by L. Amoroso, "Heidegger's <u>Lichtung as lucus a (non) lucendo</u>," pp. 137-63; Wittgenstein by Diego Marconi, pp. 164-80; both the essays by G. Comolli and F. Costa deal with Kafka.

96. For a critique of parody and deconstruction in Hillis Miller and Geoffrey Hartman (but written before my acquaintance with weak thought), see my "Malinconia Bianca; L'Intermkundium di Yale," in Peter Carravetta and Paolo Spedicato, eds., <u>Postmoderno e filosofia; percorsi e visioni della critica in America</u> (Milano: Bompiani, 1984), pp. 183-227.

15. The inescapable conclusion one draws is that weak thought is expanding hermeneutics to the level of a degrounded, nomad discourse whose main commitment is to the microdetail of the existential present. Literature, then, regains a social purpose as interpreter and shaper of forms of thinking, therefore of acting. If some of the authors in the Weak Thought anthology appear well disposed towards making philosophy a form of literature, it is because interpretive discourse need no longer be authorized, legitimated and verified by Classical Reason, or by the Platonic logos, or any totalizing and foundational belief or power. Interpretive discourse now takes the many "reasons" of our contemporary epistemological pluralism (or anarchism) as no more and no less than rhetorical constructs which "survive" through cultural changes.

What happens to the theory-method relation that we took as a basic requirement of all interpretation? On the theory side, the weakening of being entails the awareness that critical positions are multiple yet also circumscribed as to time and place; that the legitimizing principles are now norms at hand, at times invented in loco, at times motivated even as reactions/comments to peculiar experiences and thoughts; and finally, that rhetorics-the rhetoric of the disciplines, and rhetorics as philosophy -is emerging as an all too important aspect of interpretation.[97] There is no doubt that weak thought can be interpreted in different ways,[98] yet its contribution to hermeneutics cannot go unnoticed. In confirming the theory-method relation posited at the beginning, it also expands it to make each term more pliable, more rhetorically sensitive to the occasion of the text's coming into being, dialogically predisposed towards the other person, accepting to listen. The implications of weak thought for political, ethical and sociological discourse can only be ascertained in the long term, in view of the fact that, as some of the authors point out, it frees a radical element which shakes the very foundations of the systematic, organic and productive styles of these disciplines. Moreover, not enough attention is paid to the question of women (and/or feminism), and critics will certainly ask about ramifications concerning the notions of history and the state. We will have to wait and see. But at the existential and hermeneutic level, its relevance is inestimable: it listens to contingency and reasonableness, it refracts the nihilism of experience, it manifests a will to tread over boundaries and relocate as appropriate, it speaks as desired. Hardly nostalgic or apologetic, it breathes sotto voce notions of authenticity and paints chiaroscuro scapes of being in the world.

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97. This is explored in detail in Part Three of The Elusive Hermes. The authors "in between" rhetorics and philosophy analyzed are Chaim Perelman, Paul Ricoeur, Paolo Valesio and Ernesto Grassi.

98. Besides the newspaper reviews when the book came out, and the scathing critique by Carlo Augusto Viano now contained in Va' pensiero; il carattere della filosofia italiana contemporanea (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), see also articles by Stefano Rosso, "Postmodern Italy: Notes on the 'Crisis of Reason,' 'Weak Thought; and The Name of the Rose," (contains an extensive bibliography), in D. Fokkema and H. Bertens, eds., Approaching Postmodernism (Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1986); Mario Perniola, "Lettera sul pensiero debole," Alfabeta 58 (1984); Reiner Schürmann, "Deconstruction is not Enough," Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal 10, 1 (1985); and Giovanna Borradori, "Italian Weak Thought and Postmodernism," Social Text 18 (1987/88).