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## The Trans-Umweltic Express

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The reading of *The Glass Bead Game* by Herman Hesse in my late adolescence exposed me for the first time to the idea of a practice intended to *compose* the different modes of exploration of the experiential field in which we find ourselves (modes such as science, art, and politics). Hesse's program—conveniently enriched with other elements, coming notably from the transcendental and post-transcendental philosophical traditions—would ultimately lead me to the characterization of the philosophical activity that I currently endorse. By abducting the way Edmund Husserl named his philosophical project—*transcendental phenomenology*—we can characterize this conception of philosophy by means of the expression *immanent phenomenodelics*. On the one hand, the term *immanent* encodes the thesis according to which the subject of the *transcendental constitution* of subjective experience is itself a product of an *immanent institution* taking place within an impersonal experiential field. On the other hand, the term *phenomenodelics* results from the amalgamation of the term *phenomenon* (which is itself a hybridization of the Kantian notions of *phenomenon* and *noumenon* denoting the programmatic absolution of philosophy with respect to any form of transcendental limitation of experience) and the suffix *-delics* (which takes the place of the suffix in Husserl's *phenomenology* in order to stress that the *logos*-oriented *theoretical* mode of exploration should not have—I maintain—any privilege whatsoever in the philosophical activity).

In order to explain the relation between these ideas and Hesse's program, let me start with the most primordial *phenomenodelical* fact, namely that we are always already embedded in a *concrete* and *impersonal* field of experience. The term *concrete* is intended

here to stress that experience is always a fusion of percepts, affects, concepts, and intersubjective relations (in the most general—i.e., not necessarily human—scope of the term subject): to be there in the midst of the experiential field is to perceive, to feel, to understand, to be with, all at once, in an impure mixture. What I call an *abstract modality of experience* is a mode of experience resulting from a process of abstraction, i.e., from a process by means of which one abstracts certain dimensions of experience in order to focus attention on a single dimension. For instance, I can focus on the demonstration of a theorem by abstracting the perceptual field (e.g., the temperature of the room I am in, the visual field that surrounds me), the affective field (e.g., my current mood, the pulse of a symptomatic tic that affects me), and the social field (e.g., the actual human environment in the space where I am, the current political situation). I call the different dimensions of the experiential field that result from these abstractive procedures *plasma* (the affective field), *vision* (the perceptual field), *logos* (the rational field), and *socius* (the political field). But the experiential field *as such*—i.e., before subjecting it to the prismatic refraction that yields these various abstract modalities—is always a *concrete coalescence* of affects, percepts, concepts and intersubjective relations. Taking up Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (as well as Michel Henry's and David Cronenberg's) term anew, I call this concrescence *flesh*. The impersonal *flesh* is a solaristic *plasma* pulsed by drives and mesmerized by propagating *perceptual fields*, a deliquescent and iridescent element organized by the ingression of a *logos*, a phenomenodelical daydream inhabited by a *socius* of experience-able (receptive) and response-able (expressive) subjective fluctuations.



Mareaciones, Extract from video (Florencia Rodriguez Giles, 2015)

In this description, I presuppose the effectuation of what we could call—in the wake of Husserl—*phenomenodelical epokhé*. The *epokhé* denotes the *existential conversion* by means of which one suspends (or puts into brackets) any thesis regarding the ultimate nature, the supposed origin, and the hypothetical destination of the experiential field. By this conversion, every phenomenon is transmuted into a mere phenomenodelical *datum* drifting through the impersonal stream of experience. The term *flesh* denotes the phenomenodelical (im)materiality of this suspended field *in its multimodal concreteness*. The philosopher is floating within the ungrounded phenomenodelical flesh; traversed by percepts, concepts, affects, languages; inhabiting a *socius* of (inorganic, vegetable, animal, human, X) subjects. We could say that thanks to the *epokhé*, the subject—gaining access to this primordial scene of the philosophical mode of being—gets philosophically stoned.

In turn, the term *impersonal* (in the expression *concrete and impersonal field of experience*) is intended to stress that this field is always in excess with respect to the particular experience of any *actual* or *possible*, *individual* or *collective*, *empirical* or *transcendental* subject. This characterization of the experiential field implies that experience is always indexed by different forms of (what we could generally call) *locality*. Experience is always the experience of an empirical subject, which is always in a particular state (e.g., in a particular spatiotemporal position, in a particular state of motion, in a particular mood,

etc.). Moreover, such an empirical subject is always a token of a particular transcendental type of subjectivity, i.e., of a transcendental structure defining the *a priori* conditions of subjective experience in both its receptive (inhaling) and expressive (exhaling) flows. Therefore, experience is always indexed by both an *empirical* and a *transcendental perspectivism*. One particular existential possibility for a subject who finds itself locally embedded in this experiential field is to explore it, i.e., to try to mediate these different forms of locality. We can always (try to) take a walk. First, a subject can start exploring the field by forcing some changes of its empirical state (besides the changes existentially imposed on it by default, such as moving forward in time), thereby changing the content of its actual experience. By doing so, the subject affords a first form of exploration of the experiential field, what we could call an *empirical exploration*. Now, thanks to Immanuel Kant we know that the empirical degrees of freedom of a subject are dependent upon its transcendental type. Borrowing Jakob von Uexküll's terminology, we could say that its possible empirical movements unfold in a certain *Umwelt* (enviroming world), which depends on its transcendental structure. For instance, the empirical degrees of freedom of a tick and a human being—and thereby the *Umwelten* in which they can move—are not the same. If the subject wants to radicalize the scope of its exploration beyond its transcendental-dependent *Umwelt*, it must address the task of performing transcendental variations (*trans-variations*) of the very transcendental structure that makes its experience possible. To effectuate such trans-variations means to perturb, to deform or to induce mutations of the very transcendental frame that makes its experience possible (in its conceptual, perceptual, affective, social, linguistic, sexual, historical, and cultural dimensions). So finally, what I call a *speculative subject* is a subject that, besides being able to modify its *actual* experience by changing its state in its *Umwelt*, also affords mutations of the very transcendental frame that defines the “umweltic” horizon of its *possible* experiences.

To mediate the limits of experience does not only mean actualizing new possible experiences, but also modifying the transcendental frame that demarcates the possible experiences from the “impossible” ones. To do so, mankind has constructed specialized *organons* of mediation—such as art, science, and politics for instance—as well as different forms of existential practices (like for instance gymnastical, erotical, dietetical, and liturgical practices). These *organons* generally proceed by focusing on a particular modality of experience by abstracting the others. We can mediate the limits of experience by selectively plugging into the experiential field *affectively* (by tuning with the *plasma*), *perceptively* (by tuning with the *vision*), *conceptually* (by tuning with the

*logos*), or *politically* (by tuning with the *socius*). The thesis according to which the different abstract modes of exploration of the field (art, science, politics, etc.) do construct vectors of *speculative* transcendence means that they do not only allow us to perceive, to feel, to understand, and to produce new phenomena, but can also force transcendental variations of the *a priori* conditions of perceptibility, affectability, conceptuality, sociability, and production. The hybrid neologism *phenoumenon* (which traverses the Kantian distinction between phenomenon and noumenon) is intended to stress that the “intentional” pole of a “speculative” experience—i.e., of an experience enveloping a shift of the subject’s transcendental structure—is not an objective phenomenon constituted by the subject, and thus placed in a transcendental-dependent *Umwelt*. Rather, the pole of a “speculative” experience is a trans-umweltic configuration of the experiential field—i.e. a *phenoumenon*—that appears in each *Umwelt* under the form of a particular objective phenomenon.

For instance, theoretical reason (of which science, in the restricted sense of the term, is a particularly sophisticated form) is a particular mode of exploration that tries to expand our *rational* understanding of the different kinds of *phenoumena* that inhabit the experiential field (e.g., formal, physical, biological, and sociological *phenoumena*). Theoretical reason explores the experiential field by means of an experimental and theoretical *organon* that *selectively* focuses on the *perceptual* (in the experimental-technological sense of the term) and *conceptual* modes of the field to the detriment of the other dimensions (such as for instance the affective or the political dimensions). We could say that science has expanded the doors of (technologically mediated) perception and (formalized) conceptualization through the abstraction of other possible modalities of exploration. In order to mediate the limits of our understanding, theoretical reason cannot proceed by just applying the same toolbox of conceptual categories, linguistic structures, and techno-perceptual resources to new experimental data, but it also has to modify—when necessary—the very transcendental framework of linguistic expression, formalization, schematization, conceptualization, and technological perception.

According to what we have said, art, science, and politics (among other possible practices for the expansion of experience) operate differential transgressions of the (empirical and transcendental) limits of human experience by stalking the trans-umweltic interzones of the impersonal experiential field. Now, by following Hesse’s main intuition, we could try to carefully define, construct, and activate a single concrete *organon* of exploration of the experiential field capable of *composing* these different abstract sounding lines of

mediation. The program of constructing this trans-modal *organon* is (according to its definition) much more radical than the program of performing transversal compositions that are *internal* to each abstract modality, such as for instance the interdisciplinary collaborations between different *scientific* disciplines or multimedia integrations of different *artistic* practices. Since philosophy has historically provided the most radical attempts to put science, art and politics on a single plane of compossibility (such as for instance in the works of Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Hegel), I took the decision—in the wake of Badiou—to keep the term *philosophy*—or more accurately, in the terms of the Jena Romantics, *symphilosophy*—to designate this concrete *organon* of mediation. However, this terminological decision is not blind to the fact that the current practices of philosophy do not faithfully enact this trans-modal composition, notably because of the fact that philosophy has never (or very rarely) put into question the canonical form of philosophical expression and production: philosophers have always written books in which they speak *about* science, art and politics, rather than creating *organons* of exploration *effectively* entangling scientific, artistic and political procedures. We could say (by adopting a Marxist phrasing) that philosophers have hitherto only thought about the compossibility between science, art and politics; the point, however, is to concretely effectuate this composition.



Mareaciones, Extract from Video (Florencia Rodriguez Giles, 2015)

Certain extended forms of art have provided examples of trans-modal programs and strategies for inducing *concrete* modes of exploration of the experiential field, notably by producing—in the wake of the speculative romanticism (see for instance *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism* of the classmates Hölderlin, Hegel, and Schelling)—aesthetico-theologico-political knots. We can think for instance of Stéphane Mallarmé’s attempt to put poetry at the service of a forthcoming secular ceremony (modelled on the Catholic Mass) in which the “crowd” will recognize itself; of the project of a *gesamtkunstwerkian* piece capable of enveloping existing artistic disciplines into a single “total(itarian?)” (political-)artwork trans-modally connected (at least programmatically) to the utopian project of staging a mythic scene for the institution of a new political subject; or—in another zone of the political spectrum—of Walter Benjamin’s and Bertolt Brecht’s attempt to counteract the fascist “aestheticization of politics” by means of a “politicization of arts”. More recently—like for instance in Joseph Beuys’ *social sculpture* or in the framework of the so-called *curatorial turn* (notably launched by Harald Szeemann, the curator of the exhibition *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk*)—artistic practices have concretely addressed the problem of blurring certain boundaries (such as for instance the boundaries between art and daily existence; between stage and audience; between presentation and representation; between original and copy; between artist and curator; between container, context, and content; between production process, product, display, and theoretical reflexion) in order to induce trans-modal connectors between artistic, social, existential and theoretical practices. Philosophy, as I understand it, has to carefully evaluate these trans-modal projects as well as their possible impasses and dangers (we can think for instance in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s critical assessment of the onto-typological conception of politics in terms of a fictional myth, or in Hans-Jürgen Syberberg’s controversial thesis according to which it is necessary to “redeem” the Wagnerian project of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* from the instrumentalization implemented by the Third Reich) in order to adapt and adopt—when considered convenient—some of their strategies.

In any case, the philosophical *Glasperlenspiel* cannot be understood as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* for the following reasons. First, it is not the task of the philosophical composition to produce a total work *of art*, i.e. to produce mediators of the limits of experience under the aegis of the aesthetical interest of reason. In order to attain a full-fledged philosophical transversality and span a truly trans-modal space of compossibility, artistic practices in the restricted sense of the term should play no privileged role, and no mode of exploration—such as theoretical reason in its most sophisticated forms—should be

excluded. Second, it is not the task of the philosophical composition to produce a *total* work of art: the trans-modal philosophical organon—far from providing an overarching position capable of totalizing the abstract modes of thought —acts horizontally, within the “plane” occupied by these modes, by trying to *locally* synthesize abstracts procedures of exploration into concrete mediators. Far from occupying a position of domination—and far from believing that the multiplicity of abstract modes of thought could be the object of any totalization whatsoever— philosophy has to defect its supposed self-sufficiency and humbly submit itself to the irreducible sovereignty and multiplicity of these modes. Last but not least, the speculative subject that operates the philosophical probes aims to be an *untyped* subject, i.e. a subject absolved from the transcendental onto-typologie that pretends to condemn the subjects of experience to be tokens of a unique transcendental type.

Now, this leads me to another important obstruction to the activation of a truly philosophical *organon* of mediation, namely the “sutures” (to use Badiou’s terms) between philosophy and these abstract modes of exploration, such as for instance the suture between philosophy and science (e.g., Husserl), the suture between philosophy and art (e.g., Heidegger), or the suture between philosophy and ethics (e.g., Levinas). The definition of philosophy as an *organon* of concrete composition requires absolving philosophy from these “sutures”. Philosophy shares with the abstract modes of exploration their vocation to transgress the (empirical and transcendental) limits of human experience, but it must counterbalance their inherent tendency to abstraction, to depart from the multi-modal concreteness of the experiential field in order to focus on a single abstract modality. Philosophy—in this forthcoming enhanced form—can be understood as a higher form of synesthetic exploration directly plugged into to the flesh as such: philosophy does not only compose different *sensory* vectors of mediation (visual, acoustic, etc.) into synaesthetic sensoria, but also affective, conceptual, existential, and political ones. We could say that philosophy enriches the trans-umweltic directionality of the different abstract vectors of exploration with an inter-modal degree of freedom. The trans-modal vocation of such a philosophical *organon* implies that it should not establish any privileged identification to any abstract mode of experience, be it art, science or politics. In other words, no abstract mode of exploration can pretend to occupy a privileged position in the philosophical space of compossibility, that is to say an overarching position from which it could subordinate or dominate the other modes. In particular, science (or, more generally, theoretical reason) is nothing but one particular modality of experience, a mode of experience that focuses on the expansion of

conceptual and techno-perceptual experience. As such, science is an important ingredient in philosophical composition. However, any form of identification between science and philosophy, any attempt to understand philosophy as a science of sciences (Fichte), as a first or “rigorous” science (Husserl), or any definition of philosophy as a *theoretical* mode of thought defined with respects to the supposed (transcendental, etc.) limits of science betray the trans-modal nature of the philosophical exploration. It is not the task of philosophy to conceptually understand the *logos* that inheres the experiential field: the task of not giving up on the desire to understand the rational structure of the experiential field—be it at the ontological, transcendental, or ontic levels—is the defining prerogative of science (in an extended sense of the term).

In particular, we can provide a new meaning to the expression *philosophy of X* (as in philosophy of art, philosophy of science, etc.): the application of the philosophical *organon* to any abstract mode of exploration requires addressing the latter in its full concreteness. Even if a mode of exploration is oriented by a particular interest of reason (theoretical, aesthetical, political), this does not eliminate the fact that it is a concrete human activity endowed with a multi-modal richness. For instance, mathematics is oriented by a theoretical goal (to expand our rational comprehension of formal—geometrical, algebraic, numerical, etc.—structures); but it is also a concrete human activity undertaken by concrete human beings embedded in a concrete experiential field, and therefore an activity endowed with aesthetical, political, and affective dimensions. And these dimensions open communicating vessels that discretely connect mathematics to the other abstract modalities of exploration. Hence the expression *philosophy of X* does not mean that X is itself considered an object of a *theoretical* meta-discipline—e.g., epistemology, aesthetics, etc.—(in this sense, as Louis Althusser claimed, philosophy has no object), but rather an activity intended to reinsert an abstract mode of exploration in the concreteness of its effective practice, thereby opening it to possible alliances with other modes of exploration, alliances that might finally compose concrete mediators of the limits of experience. This reinsertion of an abstract sounding line of exploration within the concrete experiential field should counteract what we could call the *pathologies of abstraction*—that is, the tendency to hypostasize or isolate a mode of exploration by forgetting its intertwining and its dependency with respect to the other modalities (e.g., the dependency of—even the purest form of—scientific inquiry upon politics).

In Hesse's novel, this risk is explicitly addressed under the form of Father Jacobus's criticism regarding the isolation of Castalia with respect to the rest of the world, its ludic aestheticism, its high-culture elitism and its historical detachment. Strictly speaking, the Glass Bead Game—in its ludic, elitist, and isolated existence—still misses the philosophical project of activating an *organon* of trans-modal composition. In this novel, Hesse accomplishes the transition from the description of a single individual's formation and maturation explored in his previous works—fully inscribed in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*—to the description of the development of an institutional collective subject, more in the wake of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*. This transition is required by the very ambition of the project: the construction of an *organon* of composition capable of entangling the different abstract modes of mediation produced by mankind cannot be carried out by a single individual. However, the resulting collective subject still finds itself in a state of relative isolation, in the sense that it has uprooted itself from the human community at large and more generally—we could add—from the phenomenological field of life, from the *socius* in all its human and non-human forms. In this way, Hesse explicitly (and maybe self-critically) acknowledges the impasses of the Glass Bead Game project, impasses that ultimately lead to Knecht's decision to defect from Castalia, to counteract its purist and academicist transcendence, its ascetical retreat, its egotistic ludic monadology, its lack of historical and political engagement.



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In order to conclude, I would like to stress the importance of a comparison that subtends Hesse's novel, the comparison with music. By paraphrasing Mallarmé, we could say that *we find in Music several techniques that seem to us to belong to Philosophy; we reclaim them.* Music operates a synthesis of (what I consider to be) two essential registers of philosophical labor: *multi-modal composition* and *trans-individual concertation*. Music has the capacity to construct cross-modal vectors of exploration of the phenomenological flesh by composing *formal structures*, *perceptual qualities*, and *affective resonances* on the one hand with the capacity to induce a *collective* (and thereby political) *attunement* on the other. Regarding this last dimension of music, I think that philosophy can also be understood as an operator of trans-individual concertation in the following sense. A philosophical composition—far from being an end in itself—is an operator intended to force a differential concrete mediation of the *transcendental* limits of experience. A speculative subject is a plastic subject that can explore the experiential field by successively embodying different transcendental viewpoints, a subject that can afford (at least in principle) inter-kingdom, inter-natural, inter-cultural, inter-species, inter-nebular becomings. Now— as Husserl taught us—the fact that we can turn around a cube implies that the subjective experience of the cube is always more than the perspectival experience of one of its profiles. Since the degrees of freedom of an empirical subject allows it to take a walk in the corresponding *Umwelt*, the intentional pole of its experience is the *objective* cube as such, in the projective synthesis of its multiple profiles. We sublimate the visual perspectivism of experience by the simple fact that we can take the position of any other subject in the corresponding umweltic space. If one now extends the subject's degrees of freedom by including variations of its transcendental structure, the subject acquires the possibility—at least in principle—of having an experience of the *phenomenal* cube as such, in the projective synthesis of (at least some of) its multiple phenomenal objectifications.

We could say that the speculative subject that pilots such a Trans-Umweltic Express can actualize *multiscopic* modes of experience in the sense that it can synthesize multiple transcendental standpoints. This speculative multiscopicity goes hand in hand with a diffusion of the subject's localization: a speculative subject is a smeared form of subjectivity that, far from being sharply localized, is distributed through a certain region of the space of possible transcendental structures. At a purely physiological level, the brain is capable of *synthesizing* the visual information separately provided by each eye in order to produce a *single* visual experience. Now, since the eyes occupy different spatial

positions the resulting binocular vision does not have, strictly speaking, a well-defined focal vantage point. And this lack of a sharp localization induces the three-dimensional depth characteristic of human optic experience. We could even conceive a multiscopic generalization of binocular vision given by a spatial distribution of multiple eyes and a brain-like *organon* of synthesis capable of producing a single visual experience endowed with higher forms of depth perception. In the same way, a speculative experience cannot by definition be carried out by a token of a unique transcendental type, i.e. by a subject sharply localized in the space of possible transcendental structures. Now, the resulting *untyped* modes of subjectivation, by affording the task of sublating the transcendental perspectivism, are more prone to inhabit the immanence, to activate new speculative forms of depth perception, affection and conceptualization. The higher the degree of trans-umweltization of a speculative subject the lower the extent to which its experience is subjectively lived as a form of intentional *transcendence* unfolding from a sharply localized subjective vantage point to a constituted object. In short, the *trans-umweltization* of a subject's experience goes hand in hand with its *immanentization*. The process by means of which a speculative subject groks the experiential field points towards its impersonal and a-perspectival limit: a completely trans-umweltized experience is a self-experience of the phenomenological flesh itself, an immanent self-experience deprived of any form of transcendence, a collective no-body's experience of no-thing. By paraphrasing Hesse, we could say that *the esoterics of the glass-beadical organon points down into those depths where the phenomenological flesh eternally breathes in and out, sufficient unto itself*, in the ebb and flow of its immanent self-experience. In this way, the philosophical labour enhances the mutual attunement of a multiplicity of consonating subjects that imbricate their experiences in a collective immanent self-experience. We could say that the "musaical" scope of symphilosophy is given by the fact that it puts the inter-modal *composition* at the service of an immanence-oriented *concertation*. This collectivisation of experience, this weaving of a phenomenological community—far from depending on an identification with respect to a mythical (transcendental) type—stems from the speculative trans-typification of subjectivity.

This text is based on a conversation conducted by Jeremy Lecomte for Glass Bead. Some of the topics addressed in this interview were developed in Gabriel Catren. "Pleromatica o las Mareaciones de Elsinor." *Nombres. Revista de Filosofía* (29) 2015. Web. (<http://revistas.unc.edu.ar/index.php/NOMBRES/issue/archive>) A shorter version of this text was published in Sonia de Sanctis and Anna Longo, eds. *Breaking the Spell. Contemporary Realism under Discussion*. Mimesis International, 2015. Print.

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