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Book Review

Arjen Kleinherenbrink (2019) *Against Continuity: Gilles Deleuze's Speculative Realism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

I. Introduction

Among the figures of the French continental tradition who might be identified as *the* antagonist for the still-emerging field of object oriented ontology (and, to a lesser degree, speculative realism), Gilles Deleuze would seem, at first blush, as good a candidate as any. Closely associated with Spinozist *natura naturans*, Nietzschean *Wiederkunft* and Bergsonian *multiplicité*, Deleuze's thought is laden with that of his precursors. Despite their variety, the latter are often said to reveal the very essence of Deleuze's thought through the primacy of process and continuity. With these ideas in mind, many readers of Deleuze employ his lexicon uncritically, inheriting its terms without thorough examination of its content, so that concepts such as 'intensity', 'the virtual', 'deterritorialisation', 'flow' or 'assemblage' (to name just a few) easily become ossified into watchwords devoid of the conceptual substance that warranted their initial attraction.[1] In short, a certain image of Deleuze reduces his thought to little more than a vague philosophy of becoming (seducing in its language) at the expense of the irreducibility of entities that Deleuze's work consistently calls forth and demands to be thought.

It is this naive or vulgar image of Deleuze that Arjen Kleinherenbrink targets in *Against Continuity: Gilles Deleuze's Speculative Realism*. Because the notions of process and continuity seem, for Kleinherenbrink, to imply the priority of either an anterior entity or a homogeneous substrate, an ontology characterised by these features will always be guilty of a radical fault: reduction of one being to another. Any elaboration of a metaphysical programme which explains the ontology

of an entity by virtue of its inclusion, causation or relation to another will leave out exactly the *being* of that entity, what keeps it from being another thing. Contrary to this tendency, Kleinherenbrink argues that Deleuze is in fact a champion of absolutely irreducible individuals – rather than flows, becoming and so on. Such individuals constitute the bedrock of his ontology. The consequence of this shift in how one understands his ontology is that Deleuze is not merely a precursor for the field of speculative realism but is one of its superior figures, having already anticipated many of its problems. Indeed, in one of his more controversial arguments, Kleinherenbrink claims Deleuze's endorsement of a virtual realm of continuity is restricted to *Difference and Repetition*, an ontological mistake rectified in subsequent texts. Instead, Deleuze, from the *Logic of Sense* to his final texts, was a philosopher wholly dedicated to the radical *discontinuity* between entities.

II. Summary

With a view to explicating such a premise, Kleinherenbrink advances a systematic reading of Deleuze's philosophy under the aegis of what he calls 'machinic ontology'. The 'machine' accordingly stands in Deleuze's ontology as both fundamental and ubiquitous: all machines are irreducible to other machines, and all entities whatsoever are machines. Elaborating the consequences of Deleuze's oft-repeated motto that 'relations are external to their terms', these two features define what Kleinherenbrink names the 'externality thesis'. By virtue of his reading of 'externality', Kleinherenbrink's work sits well with a number of recent attempts at developing a 'flat ontology', such as those put forward by Graham Harman, Tristan Garcia, Levi Bryant and Manuel DeLanda (among others). Central to this view, and corollary to each machine's irreducibility, is the rejection of any transcendent first or final machine into which other machines may fall. This rejection subtends both Kleinherenbrink's reading of Deleuze's critique of representation and what he calls Deleuze's sustained crusade against 'internalism'. Nonetheless, despite its ontological irreducibility, the machine is not ontologically static. A machine is always constituted by other machines, but it also has a structure which determines both the machine's being-in-itself (its 'virtual' or 'withdrawn' aspect) as well as its relations with other machines (its 'actualisation' or 'manifestation'). Taken together, this allows Kleinherenbrink to argue for an image of Deleuze as, at once, a realist philosopher who insists on the full ontological

reality of everything that is; and a speculative philosopher who claims that the being of a machine necessarily withdraws from all ontological access. Thus, the remainder of the book is dedicated to elaborating Kleinherenbrink's 'machinic ontology', including especially the externality thesis, the fourfold structure of machines, and a theory of their relations. These, in turn, are punctuated by 'intermezzos' that show how Deleuze intersects or collides with contemporary continental realists.

Given the externality thesis, wherein every entity harbours an irreducible element of itself, a necessary question becomes inevitable: what is the precise anatomy of the entity such that it allows for an inscrutable ontological privacy? This question receives a properly schematic answer in Kleinherenbrink's fourfold division of machines, or the 'machine thesis'. Throughout Deleuze's corpus, Kleinherenbrink detects a tendency towards a universal ontological structure cleaved symmetrically between two differing twofolds: the actual and the virtual. While Kleinherenbrink maintains Deleuze's familiar terms here, his reading argues not for virtual and actual *realms* but 'an internal difference in kind between a virtual and actual *aspect* that constitutes the ontological structure of any entity whatsoever' (Kleinherenbrink 2019: 37). Each twofold aspect of a machine is constituted by an instance of the *One* – so that there is *this* irreducibility or *this* relation – and an instance of a *Multiple* – so that there can be a distinction between *this* and *that* irreducibility or relation. Despite its lucidity, Kleinherenbrink only brings this about through some fairly extreme textual condensation, excising pieces from all over Deleuze's corpus as it suits his schema.

The actual 'One', its unity, is defined as 'Sense' (synonymous with 'sense event' and 'partial object') and its 'Multiple' as 'Quality' (synonymous with 'flow'). Largely derived from Kleinherenbrink's idiosyncratic readings of *Logic of Sense* and *Anti-Oedipus*, Sense comprises the unity of an actual encounter between machines, while Quality is what ensures that experience is a differentiated, contiguous flow: an encounter must involve determinations (qualities) *of* something (the sense of which a determination is said). Yet, both elements of this dichotomy are effects. According to Kleinherenbrink, the actual unity of Sense is the 'expressed', which indicates its virtual expression. Sense is a minimally specified, yet sterile, noumenon: it is that which points away from the encounter from within the encounter, towards the virtual unity of the machine. Quality, by contrast, is 'inherently variable' (Kleinherenbrink 2019: 135); it is constantly modified by other sense

events involved in machinic production, modifications that nonetheless prevent all encounters from being reduced to a single totalising Sense.

On the other side of the fourfold, there is the virtual twofold of 'Body' (synonymous with 'Figure', 'Body without Organs', 'Problem') and 'Idea' (synonymous with 'Desire', 'Singularity', 'Intensive Matter', 'Power', 'Code'). Like the dichotomy of the actual above, the Body and the Idea allow the virtual aspect to be both unified and differentiated. According to Kleinherenbrink, *the Body* is a 'transcendental unity, irreducible to relational dimensions such as history, possibilities, composition, empirical qualities, users, and functions ... that aspect of each machine which enters into nothing and into which nothing enters' (Kleinherenbrink 2019: 87–8). This absolute withdrawal is what resists integration or actualisation, but it also constitutes the properly emancipatory or nomadic element of machines, according to Kleinherenbrink. In addition to staving off an 'undifferentiated abyss' into which all individuals find the same transcendental conditions, *the Idea* also coordinates the internal conditions of the appearance of machines in relations with other machines. Ideas are the non-relational yet still mutable essences of machines. They are *essences* (as opposed to accidents) since they maintain priority (logically or ontologically) over the actual determinations of machines in their relations, but they are, nonetheless, made mutable by and through these relations. The transformation of machines, along with their possible creation and destruction, raises questions about how the privacy of machines entertains real ontological becoming, to which we return below.

In view of the machine thesis, wherein everything is a produced machine, including its variable Ideas and inscrutable Body, Kleinherenbrink presents a new reading of the Deleuzian syntheses. Immensely abbreviating and compiling parts of *Difference and Repetition*, *Logic of Sense* and *Anti-Oedipus*, Kleinherenbrink reinterprets the three syntheses of connection, disjunction and conjunction, as a 'universal medium or background' (Kleinherenbrink 2019: 40) for the indirect interactions of irreducible machines: the manifestation of relations, transformation of the virtual Ideas (essences) and the creation of new machines. The first synthesis – habit-connection-production – accounts for actual manifestations and the 'basic fact of relating' (Kleinherenbrink 2019: 112). Insofar as the actual is experience – and an experience cannot itself experience another experience – the encounter between machines happens not between their actual twofolds but rather between a virtual twofold – the Body and Idea as a machine's particular 'point of view' – and another machine's actual

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twofold. What keeps safe the irreducibility of a machine, paramount to the integrity of the externality thesis, is that this relation is unilateral for the Body: 'The carpentry of beings is forged one unilateral relation at a time, and each relation exclusively runs from a virtual body … to the actual and manifest aspect of one or several other machines' (Kleinherenbrink 2019: 114). This recalcitrant relation between the virtual body and actual manifestation – what Kleinherenbrink calls 'contraction' – is meant to explain how machines in themselves (or their virtualities) never directly touch. Between the Body itself and the 'perspective' it helps constitute, the connective synthesis preserves discontinuity even as it produces continuity in actual experience. The distribution of the continuous raises more questions for us below.

The second synthesis – pure memory-disjunction-registration – accounts primarily for the intensive becoming proper to Deleuzian essences. However, it also explains how the virtual twofold can become a point of view for contraction and thereby ground the connective synthesis itself. Flattening the profundity of Deleuze's account, Kleinherenbrink understands disjunction as the inexhaustibility of a machine's Idea so that 'a relation never fully absorbs an entity in its being encountered, and conversely it cannot fully deploy an entity in having an encounter' (Kleinherenbrink 2019: 190). But it has also a second dimension. Insofar as the virtual aspect of a machine contracts actual manifestations, it undergoes a mereological transformation: 'anything contracted into an encounter with me is part of me' (Kleinherenbrink 2019: 193). Thus, between the first and second syntheses, a circle of production begins to emerge. Despite its mutability, Kleinherenbrink is quick to underline that only the virtual Idea undergoes variation; the Body remains unwounded by the introjection of new parts (variation without incorporation). What truly allows for two machines to remain irreducible to their relations is that the establishment of a relation is in fact the creation of a new, surplus machine.

The last synthesis – future-conjunction-consumption – involves the genesis of machines; through it, relations do not threaten the irreducibility of that which they relate but, rather, secure it. In fact, this is implied by Deleuze's commitment to univocity. Everything begins in a contingent encounter, but what comes of the encounter also has full being or reality, however tenuous an existence it leads. In Kleinherenbrink's example of the perception of a tulip, one can never reduce this newly formed machine to either the perceiver or the actual tulip, and thus 'all relations imply that something becomes detached

from the immediate production of an actuality' (Kleinherenbrink 2019: 225–6). Similar to the synthesis of disjunction, the mereological aspect is the driving motor: in the encounter of sense events between different machines, a relation is forged that has a virtual itself that is irreducible to the connective 'perspective' of both machines but whose Idea is drawn from those same sense events. Because this happens in every machinic relation and all machines owe their genesis to other machines, Kleinherenbrink elaborates the third synthesis in terms also of its futural expression in *Difference and Repetition*: the necessary production of the new is nothing other than the eternal return itself. Importantly implied by its irreducibility (what Kleinherenbrink also calls here 'independence of the product to production'), the order between the machines, and the conditions of their existence, are always decided locally, immanently and between the machines in play in a given conjunction. This is why the eternal return only returns difference, or why it ramifies the whole of chance with each throw of the dice. The only absolute guarantee of being is also the principle of its ungrounding, and the wellspring of that which did not exist before. Conjunction, Kleinherenbrink rightly sees, gives irreducibility its absolute ontological necessity.

III. Immanent Criticism

Against Continuity presents, perhaps, the boldest attempt yet to present a holistic reconstruction of Deleuze's ontological system. Given the fact that each of Deleuze's works takes on new lexical and conceptual registers even while recasting old ones, this is a momentous task fraught with perils for any reader of Deleuze. These challenges are what makes Deleuze a philosophical wellspring rarely equalled, but they are also responsible for many widespread misreadings and controversies regarding even the most basic concepts in Deleuze's repertoire. Despite the incredible leverage which Kleinherenbrink gets out of his fourfold schema and his interpretation of the externality thesis, there are nevertheless several complications which present themselves both in the immanent logic of his reconstruction and in the manner by which his approach to exegesis attenuates the philosophical richness of Deleuze's thought.

Continuity: Beginning with the former, there is an issue with Kleinherenbrink's system in relation to the guiding polemic of *Against Continuity*. Whatever analytical traction the founding gesture of substituting a continuous virtual process with a discontinuous virtual aspect gives Kleinherenbrink's reading, and despite providing

a polemical and rhetorical bulwark against some of the worst quasi-mystical readings of Deleuze, Kleinherenbrink's premise nonetheless contains its own philosophical hang-ups that must be taken into consideration in turn.

For one, it is not obvious why the concept of continuity *must* be contradistinct from that of the discrete or the individual. For example, no one would deny that the real number line involves continuity. Between any two points on the line there is a continuum of numbers that make up the distance. This does not stop the real number line from being distinct from both that of which it is a part (e.g. the complex plane) and that which is a part of it (the numbers which make up the line). In terms of the latter, these numbers constitute this continuity itself and yet each number is distinct from every other and from the line as a whole. We see no reason to assume that this is not ontologically generalizable. The notion of continuity seems not only to be compossible with the notion of irreducibility (whether virtual or actual) as it presents itself in Deleuze's work, but Kleinherenbrink's reading seems to demand some notion of continuity between the virtual and the actual (one example might be in the form of an infinite regress, implied by the convertibility of relation and machine in conjunction) in order to give machines both full irreducibility as well as full mutability. Kleinherenbrink even admits to the necessity of continuities on the side of the actual, but his rejection of the virtual as 'realm' (though much is right in this account) prevents him from seeing that continuity pervades the entire breadth of ontology,

Kleinherenbrink's trajectory is a welcome one; it still remains our opinion, nevertheless, that one of Deleuze's signal achievements was to do away with the opposition between the continuous and the discrete and, in so doing, show the robustness of their perpetual relations of grounding or re-emergence on different registers: something which is grounded in continuity in one stratum is discrete in the next, so that – importantly – the continuous is in no way in conflict with the singularity and irreducibility of each entity in its equal claim to being. If continuity is *actually* manifest, and the Ideas of machines emerge by virtue of these manifestations, how is the withholding of the virtual rigorously maintained? Might we think an excess proper to the continuous? Continuity, it seems, need not appeal to a false metaphysical depth (a homogeneous realm or undifferentiated abyss) in order to penetrate to the heart of each thing in its irreducibility and mutability.

Privacy: Concomitant with the notion of discontinuity is the notion of the withdrawal of the machine, that which, according to Kleinherenbrink, constitutes its proper being-in-itself, its irreducibility

to that which it encounters, that which generates it, and that which it generates. Much like the philosophy of Harman, this implies that no thing has ultimate ontological access to any other thing. The meaning of Kleinherenbrink's interpretation of the externality thesis blooms from this initial commitment. At the same time, in order to save machines from being eternal objects, each machine can be affected by its relations, change its nature, and be created and destroyed. This suite of commitments together presents certain inconsistencies. First, some form of ontological access is implied by any relation, change, becoming, and so on (even the possibility of speculation on 'absolute withdrawal', if justifiably true, assumes a form of ontological via epistemological access, however tenuous or indirect). Thus it is unwarranted to assume that withdrawal and irreducibility are two sides of the same coin, since it is the former that is meant to vouchsafe for the latter, and is not possible to assume without self-refutation for the argument from access given above. Withdrawal is also refuted by textual evidence, such as Deleuze's invocation of the 'absolute proximity' of beings (Deleuze 1994: 37),[2] where full ontological access of every being to every other licenses Deleuze's commitment to univocity. If this difference between the ontological privacy and existential publicity of the machine is insisted upon (*de jure* and not merely *de facto*), does it not sneak equivocity in through the back door in a reformulated guise of Heidegger's 'ontological difference' (the difference between being and beings)? If not, how is this difference to be maintained and accounted for, since it plays a spinal role in Kleinherenbrink's metaphysical programme?

Along these lines, one wonders about the validity of calling this thesis an 'externality' thesis, since it implies, first and foremost, the *interiority of the machine* rather than the exteriority of relations. While the distinction may sound somewhat tautological, it has very widespread consequences for the theory of the constitution of entities. It is more plausible to us that the externality of relations means that these 'outside' relations maintain their own ontological validity not from withdrawal of relata but from the relational constitution of the relata themselves, along with the fact of the possible migration, traversal or transformation of entities out of their originary genetic nexus. Although we must again praise Kleinherenbrink's attempt to genuinely think this predicament in the substance and detail of his theory (especially through the conjunctive synthesis), his original commitment to the privacy of entities hampers what may otherwise have been a less conceptually tortured expression of these metaphysical implications. Through the problem of ontological privacy, the theory of relations – often so rich

with particularity in Deleuze's descriptions and examples – suffers a Procrustean fate in *Against Continuity*, yoked as relations are to the fourfold bed of Kleinherenbrink's machines.

Multiplicity: Accordingly, Kleinherenbrink's fourfold provides philosophical solutions only by retreating to a schematic identity. In an attempt to disambiguate the elements of the fourfold, Kleinherenbrink gives a succinct distribution of these elements: 'If the Figure is what machines *are* and actual manifestations are what they *do*, then *desire* is what they *have*' (Kleinherenbrink 2019: 148). Yet the machinic distribution between *being*, *having* and *doing* is dissonant with the strict isomorphism between the virtual and the actual that undergirds the fourfold of *Against Continuity*. Just as the *multiple of quality* distinguishes the *empty unity of sense*, so too does the *multiple of the Idea* distinguish the unity of the *Body*. In his zeal for 'externality', Kleinherenbrink neglects a Deleuzian thesis of equal importance: that the conditioned do not resemble their conditions – the latter being different in kind (Deleuze 1994: 69). To forget this insight is precisely to forget that one cannot trace the transcendental from the empirical via resemblance without paying the price of confusing real conditions with general conditions of mere possibility (Kant's problem). Indeed, Kleinherenbrink sometimes has trouble disambiguating his fourfold, as when he notes the similarity of the virtual Body and actual Sense as 'neutral, sterile, and impassible' (Kleinherenbrink 2019: 127) but never clarifies the source of this identification.

While the mirrored structure of the fourfold does seem to be endorsed in *The Fold*, the citation used by Kleinherenbrink himself actually suggests a non-unilateral structure where Deleuze argues that relations are completed, not only one-to-multiple and multiple-to-one, but in a veritable *Omnis in unum* (Deleuze 1993: 145).[3] These supplementary relations are conveniently left undeveloped in Kleinherenbrink's subsequent explication of the syntheses, as these relations form the basis for precisely what would trouble the clear distinctions Kleinherenbrink advocates for: these relations conjure up *zones of indiscernibility*, a recurrent theme in Deleuze's later work. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, becoming is a 'communication', whose reality is found 'in that which suddenly sweeps us up and makes us become – a *proximity, an indiscernibility* that extracts a shared element' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 278–9). This difficulty with Kleinherenbrink's schema could perhaps be boiled down to a fundamental misunderstanding of what characterises a multiplicity, or what counts as its ontological essence.

IV. Reading Deleuze

Finally, apart from the immanent logical problems that Kleinherenbrink's reconstruction presents, there are several issues of reading Deleuze in *Against Continuity* which present problems for Kleinherenbrink's work and for Deleuze studies in general. These concern which models of scholarship are important and redeemable in continuing to read Deleuze as a figure in the history of thought.

To begin, one has to ask oneself how *Against Continuity* operates textually. It stands apart from many texts (probably even from some of the more holistic and systematic readings of Deleuze) in that Kleinherenbrink is not concerned with hermeneutic exercises. He isn't interested, for its own sake, in developing an interpretation integrated with recapitulation. This makes him unlike many of the strictly 'philosophical' readings of Deleuze's work that one can find in English, readings where fidelity to the text and context is paramount (where fidelity falls back on transmission of putative information). Neither is he interested in constructing a genealogy of the Deleuzian corpus, within which one might track the development or transformation of terms or concepts through Deleuze's philosophical life. (Many monographs have already cleared this path.) Instead, Kleinherenbrink presents a strictly unitary account of Deleuze's ontology that seeks to isolate certain ontological constants without which the rest of Deleuze's work, perhaps, could not function. The author's approach in this case is, therefore, in keeping with the spirit of Deleuze's own practice of the history of philosophy, since Deleuze himself can be imagined as extracting similar structures or systems from the philosophers he so cherishes (Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson). In doing so, Deleuze produced an image of these philosophers somewhat unrecognizable to the eyes of many of his contemporaries. Furthermore, reading this way pushed up against received notions about the function and material of the history of philosophy, whose contents were understood as given, over and done, simply in the past. For Deleuze, by contrast – as perhaps for all genuine philosophers – the history of philosophy is always up for grabs, just because it is productive of philosophy itself. Insofar as it fails the test of productivity, the history of philosophy loses its force and its reason. All this may be said, to a degree, of Kleinherenbrink, since he presents one of the boldest proposals in Deleuze studies to date and attempts to push his reading up against many contemporary problems in philosophy. But we must also ask: what delivers this appraisal in *Against Continuity*,

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and how does it relate to Deleuze's own historical impulse? Here we can outline only a few consequential tendencies.

In the exegesis of a philosopher one can be hamstrung by a dilemma between producing trivial, regurgitative readings of the work and readings having little or no resonance with the original. While *Against Continuity* avoids both of these pitfalls, Kleinherenbrink's reconstruction (his revisionism) presents definite weaknesses regarding its fidelity not only to the *letter of the text* but, more seriously, to the *spirit of the philosophy*. This may showcase his independence as a thinker, as well as the autonomy of the problems which he brings Deleuze to bear on, but it is worth examining all the same. For instance, Kleinherenbrink's use of quotation shapes his approach to exegesis as well as the rhetorical substance and textual authority of the book. His primary quotational device is to take single sentences (or phrases) from varying works in order to complete his own thought and confirm his theses. This is a technique that, in part, he probably employs in conscious emulation of Deleuze's historical monographs. The critical difference with *Against Continuity* lies in the apparent insensitivity that Kleinherenbrink sometimes displays for the impetus of Deleuze's thought in a given quote, something that Deleuze, in his short quotes and eclecticism, rarely loses sight of in other authors (even where his interpretations are intentionally controversial). Such insensitivity is by no means uniformly true in Kleinherenbrink's reading, but the lack of context in his quotation is prevalent enough that there are many instances (for example, on the notion of 'sense') where he falls into flagrant, if productive, misreadings. Some are intentional and serve the ends of his schema; others appear to be caused by innocent ignorance of (or wilful disregard for) the content of a concept or argument, or the role it holds in the system or structure Deleuze elaborates. This insensitivity also inclines us towards a general suspicion of Kleinherenbrink's main objectives; it begins to chip away at our charity towards his machinic system as a reading of Deleuze's oeuvre.

A connected problem, by no means the least relevant for Kleinherenbrink's project, concerns the way in which apparent differences in terms, concepts and problematics are covered over in his reading of Deleuze. Accordingly, to name just a single example, we find the terms 'Desire', 'Idea', 'Power', 'singularities' and even 'code' treated as strict synonyms, rather than as a set of connected concepts that find among themselves zones of indiscernibility. Methodologically, what the will-to-synonymisation implies – in its desire for total and unique sense, in which distinct things are definitively separated – goes against both

Deleuze's theory of being as well as his conception of systematicity, which displaces the schematic paradigm in favour of a dynamical and problematic understanding of system. For these reasons, and others we could not spare words for, any *fruitful* reading of *Against Continuity* (many of which seem possible) must also be an extremely *cautious* one.

Against Continuity is a 'problematic' reading of Deleuze: problematic in the positive, Deleuzian, sense and, at times, in the pejorative sense too. It has faults, to be sure, but it is also a book without trepidation, full of intellectual imagination, one which has stirred in us (at least temporarily) serious doubts about our own readings of Deleuze, and through them, brought us to some of the most genuine re-engagement with the beating heart of Deleuze's thought of any secondary work we've encountered. There are many works that hew closer to Deleuze's 'intention', but few that inspire as deep a reacquaintance with Deleuze's philosophy.

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Dylan Vaughan and M. Curtis Allen

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Notes

1. See, for instance, Ian Buchanan's (2017) essay 'Assemblage Theory, or, the Future of an Illusion' in this journal, which diagnoses this problem in relation to the use in the social sciences of the term 'assemblage'.
2. See *Difference and Repetition*, 37: 'There, however, where they are borne by hubris, all things are in absolute proximity, and whether they are large or small, inferior or superior, none of them participates more or less in being, nor receives it by analogy.'
3. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, 145: 'Whence the existence of a cycle, "*Omnis in unum*," such that the relations of one-to-multiple and multiple-to-one are completed by a one-to-one and a mulitiple-to-multiple, as Michel Serres has shown.'

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