

On Prompting

*Manuscript to a Lecture for the Students of the MA Module
Digital Architectonics, Summer 2026, TU Wien*

Vera Bühlmann, Buti April 2026

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Part I — The Situation

It was somewhat difficult to prepare for today because I am not entirely sure from which direction to approach these materials. On the one hand, I have reached a point where I could simply present them: the texts that have gradually emerged around this idea of a respiratory geometry, or what has provisionally become Elements of a Respirational Geometry. Yet it feels more appropriate, at least for now, to speak about how these texts came about, and to connect that process with a particular mode of working with AI that I find genuinely breathtaking. Perhaps I can begin by picking up a thread from yesterday. I only read fragments of the text, but there is a short passage near the end that captures something of the movement of thought that I value in the development of these ideas. It is entitled Pan and Echo.

Pan loved Echo
not when she answered—
but when she hid.
In the Halm,
among stems that already knew
how to stand and bend,
she did not speak first.
She let the field hold.
That is the situation:
what is already placed,
already sounding,
before you arrive.
Pan did not clear it.

He did not command her out.
He played.
A pipe—cut reed,
a small Entwurf:
thrown forward into the same field
that concealed her.
Not to capture.
To touch the conditions
under which she might answer.
And Echo—
never origin, always return—
shifted the field
by answering differently.
That is the event.
Not Pan alone,
not Echo alone,
but the moment
the situation reorders
because something was risked
without guarantee.

The passage is admittedly somewhat pathetic in tone. Yet what interests me in it is the centrality it gives to desire, attraction, and even erotics. At the same time, it does so with a clear awareness of something that came up in our discussions yesterday: ideas are dangerous. To engage seriously with ideas is risky. It can be risky for one's certainties, for one's sense of self, even for one's sanity. In a certain sense, all art revolves around this danger. It is why cultures generate stories, myths, and figures through which such forces can be approached indirectly. The difficulty is that avoiding them does not make them disappear. On the contrary, they often become even more dangerous when left unattended. They are there regardless.

The intuition that lies at the centre of what I would like to show you today—although I hesitate even to call it a proposal, since these ideas are barely two months old—is a kind of inversion. At present they are more like conceptions than established positions. I do not know whether they will endure in their current form. They have already undergone a rather adventurous evolution, and I suspect they will continue to change. Yet this inversion has been

fundamental for me because it allowed me to bring into communication two fields from which I come. One is philosophy; the other is literary studies. In literary studies, one spends one's time reading books and trying to learn how to speak about them. In this respect, the situation is not entirely unlike what we do when we read treatises, plans, or houses. We are not writers ourselves in the sense in which contemporary culture often understands authorship. Rather, we love the works we encounter, and we try to understand how they think.

The mood expressed in the passage about Pan and Echo captures this quite well. The aim is not possession. It is not to own an idea, nor to immobilize it by forcing it into a fixed interpretation. Rather, one hopes that something of what the work incorporates might begin to resonate more generally, somewhat detached from the particular embodiment in which it first appeared. Works of art embody ideas. Ideas are indeed dangerous, and they often become the source of conflict. Yet they also possess a capacity for pacification. They can reconcile as much as they divide. This happens when a work succeeds in touching something that exceeds the intentions of its author and the properties of the object itself. It happens when it manages to enter into resonance with something universal. Not a universal in the sense of abstraction detached from experience, but a universal that becomes audible through a singular form. The artwork does not own it. The artist does not own it. Rather, for a brief moment, both become capable of carrying it.

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From the side of philosophy, the universal is always a complicated matter. As soon as one begins to grasp it, there is a constant temptation to appropriate it: to turn it into a representation, a concept, something that ultimately depends upon us. Yet that is precisely what the universal cannot be. It names a domain in which things do not depend on our making them. It names something real. At the same time, it is not simply independent of us. It is also the field within which what we discover, what we understand, and what we make sense of can find its place again. It is therefore neither purely dependent nor purely independent. It exceeds our intentions, yet it remains capable of accommodating them. This is where I have

always felt an affinity with natural philosophy, with mechanics, and with mathematics. When we encounter something there, it holds whether we believe in it or not, whether we desire it or not. The explanations we develop may help us stabilize a relation to it, but they do not constitute the thing itself. Looking back, this tension seems to have been at the core of much of what I have been doing.

In literary studies, at least in the context in which I was trained, one often worked through criticism. Not criticism in a pejorative sense, but in the sense of asking what makes a particular work timely. Why does it matter now? What does it allow us to think at a particular moment? This is a beautiful task, because to say that something is timely is to say that it offers relations through which conflicts can be accommodated more gently. Take, for example, the industrial revolution. Literature does not simply tell us what happened. It develops fictions. Yet these fictions do not aspire to factual truth. Rather, they elaborate ideas to a degree that allows them to function as temperaments, as modes of attunement. They introduce a certain gentleness. Even when they are frightening, even when they confront us with something deeply unsettling, they create a bounded space for thought. They distinguish an inside from an outside and establish a relation between the two.

This resonates strongly with a notion that has appeared repeatedly throughout this course: the notion of place. A place, in this sense, does not possess a fixed outline or contour. Rather, it is demarcated by two *eschatons*, two outermost points. There is an outermost point from within the place itself, from the perspective of inhabiting it. Yet the very existence of such an inner limit implies an outside. And in order to conceive this outside—to project oneself beyond one's own place, to estrange oneself from one's belonging—one must also imagine an outermost point from the side of that projected exterior. The two are inseparable. Every place carries with it an outside, and every outside is correlated with a place. If one thinks the outside from another place, a different outermost point emerges. The relation shifts. I sometimes think of this as a double articulation, or perhaps even a duplicated double articulation. For thinking itself only becomes possible because we are never entirely confined to a single place. To give oneself over to an idea is always, to some degree, to leave behind a place of familiarity, safety, and control. Thinking exposes us. Yet it never exposes us absolutely.

There is always another place from which the exposure itself can be viewed.

All of this has a great deal to do with topology. Topology can literally be understood as a logic of places. Its importance lies in the fact that it allows us to think space without presupposing an absolute metric. Distances, measures, and units become local and situational. Topology speaks of neighbourhoods rather than coordinates. Yet topology also has a limitation. It remains, in a certain sense, an expansion of an already given place. It accommodates an enormous spectrum of variations, but it does so by extending a structure that is already known. It generalizes. It enlarges.

With regard to what remains genuinely outside thought, however, it behaves much like any other place. It still requires the projection of these double eschatons. This is why I believe the distinction between generalization and abstraction is so important. Generalization is expansive. It unfolds types, formal schemes, and structures. It multiplies possibilities while preserving a continuity of form. Abstraction, by contrast, operates differently. Abstraction detaches. It extracts a figure. One could perhaps unfold the motif of Pan much further than any general theory of desire, especially if desire is understood as sustained by its own unfulfilment. Yet what emerges there is not a generalization but an abstraction. For this reason, I would say that abstraction is figural, whereas generalization is formal. And it is precisely around this distinction that the notion of fate, which gradually surfaced in this work, began to take shape.

What fascinated me about this notion of *Versatz* is that it captures something similar to what we discussed yesterday regarding the relation between event and situation. The event enters you; the situation is what appears when you enter it. Or, to return to the image of Pan and Echo: there are always two. They remain distinct. They do not fuse into one another. The beauty lies precisely in the fact that they do not unify and yet nevertheless dwell together, or perhaps better, they co-inhabit a field without collapsing their difference. Philosophically, this is where things become difficult. The universal is traditionally associated with unity, while difference seems to resist unification. How, then, can difference inhabit the universal without being dissolved by it? There is a genuine paradox here. Yet this is also why certain metaphysical figures persist. Figures such as the Analemma, the Chiasm, or other recurrent forms of

thought are not merely conceptual tools. They are instruments for thinking. They disappear for a time, then resurface. They return in altered constellations, under different historical conditions, yet they remain recognizably themselves. They endure because they continue to address a problem that never fully goes away.

This reflection emerged through a somewhat unexpected encounter with Walter Benjamin. I had taught Benjamin for years, mostly in English translation. Only when I returned to his texts in German did I realize how much gets lost. One of his central terms is *Darstellung*. In English it is often translated as "representation" or occasionally as "performance." Yet neither translation is quite satisfactory. Literally, *Darstellung* is closer to a placing-before, a bringing-into-presence. It is an arrangement through which things are allowed to show themselves.

The image that came to mind was that of a still life. Heterogeneous and incommensurable things are brought into relation without being subordinated to a single narrative or a single logic. They compose a field together. I began discussing this with ChatGPT, asking what a more adequate translation of *Darstellung* might be. One suggestion that emerged was "display." I liked it immediately. A display is not simply a representation; it stages a relation among elements. Yet I was not fully satisfied. Display still seemed too static. The conversation continued, and eventually another possibility surfaced: displacement. *Darstellung* understood not as the presentation of something already given, but as an active repositioning. A displacement does not necessarily reveal anything hidden. It rearranges. It shifts relations. It alters the field in which things appear. Yet even this seemed insufficient. In German, there remains a subtle difference. Displacement still carries traces of disclosure, whereas what interested me was the activity of repositioning itself. After several further iterations, a new term emerged: *Versatz*.

Part II — *Versatz*

I had never encountered the word in this sense before, and I found it immediately inspiring. I began using it in early February during the semester break. Soon afterwards I was participating in a course with

engineers and physicists, and they reacted rather strongly. For them, Versatz already had a technical resonance, particularly in relation to quantum physics, where it appears almost as a troubling notion. It seems to challenge the assumption that a universal order can be closed into a final consistency. Versatz insists upon differences that remain operative and cannot be completely reconciled. Some of the participants warned me to be cautious with the term. But when this happens, I usually become even more curious. The more I worked with it, the more productive it became. What fascinated me was that Versatz did not abolish universality. Quite the contrary. It suggested a universal that articulates itself through irreducible differences rather than despite them. It was for this reason that I began to think more seriously about a conception of division that is not merely privative. The Latin *sexus*, after all, literally means division. The question then becomes: what kind of unity is capable of sustaining division without eliminating it, and what kind of difference is capable of belonging without becoming identical?

It is not the same as gender. I had been thinking about this much earlier, although then it appeared through the figure of the flower and through the notion of genitality. What interested me was a kind of excitability of the universal. If the universal cannot be represented, then it cannot simply stand there as a fixed object. It must be quick. It must emerge, surface, become apparent, and just as well withdraw from appearance again. It can disappear without properly dying. There is an activity to it, and one in which we participate. For a long time I referred to this as the genitality of the universal. What was interesting was the reaction it provoked, especially in gender and feminist discourses. This is perhaps already a ChatGPT story, although the mode of thinking itself was there long before ChatGPT. It is more like the movement of a bat: sending out signals and seeing what comes back. With this notion of the genitality of the universal, what came back was often irritation. Many people could not imagine that it was doing anything other than reintroducing substance as a foundational category. At the same time, some of those working with Irigaray were intrigued by it. Yet it never really led anywhere. It remained suspended. I gave a lecture on it in Barcelona; a few people picked it up. That was almost ten years ago. But the idea stayed where it was.

What changed things was this notion of Versatz, and then,

subsequently, the notions of tuning and alignment that emerged from it. I went back and began speaking almost exclusively in terms of *Versatz* in German. Then I asked how one might translate it into English. By that point, the earlier conversation had drifted too far away, and ChatGPT no longer returned the term displacement. Instead, it suggested *alignment*. This immediately caught my attention because alignment is the central term in contemporary discussions around general artificial intelligence. There, however, alignment is usually understood as something imposed: an agreement secured through decision, declaration, regulation, or subjection. It is an alignment that leaves very little room for difference and very little room for *Versatz*. So I began working with this notion of alignment differently.

If alignment is not imposed but emerges, then it can only arise through a relation between generalization and abstraction. Between the formal and the figural. Between the expansive movement of generalization and the extracting movement of abstraction. And for that, we need a different understanding of form. If it makes sense to speak of a genitivity of the universal—of an excitability that is not governed by economy, not governed by the logic of scarcity—then perhaps forms themselves have to be thought differently. Perhaps forms are always born from couplings of differences. Perhaps every form is the temporary result of an encounter. The differences themselves remain irreducible. They are somewhat like the wave and the particle in quantum physics. There is no point in positivizing them. There is no point in deciding once and for all what they are. Pan does not seek to capture Echo. Echo exists only insofar as she returns. The moment he tries to make her fully present, everything collapses.

Once one accepts this, attention shifts. The task is no longer to represent differences correctly. Nor is it to grant them a stable place within a positive order of recognition. Instead, the question becomes climatic. Difference begins to resemble air, water, earth, weather.

Form, then, is no longer the representation of a substance. Form becomes an alignment. Not a fixed alignment, but a temporary fitting. A holding together. A tuning. Something that achieves consistency for a moment because heterogeneous elements happen to resonate with one another. In this sense, forms are always historical. They are never absolute. They endure only insofar as the

alignment endures. And because the alignment can shift, the form can shift as well. What matters is not permanence but attunement: the capacity of differences to hold together without being reduced to sameness. But they are there. They are real, and they are effective. That is a bit of the background.

What I then started to do was, in a sense, a consequence of the fact that I had never worked with topics of this scale before. Even to think about architectonics rather than architecture is already to move into a much larger territory. Yet architectonics still remains closer to the general than to situations. And for me, situations have always been decisive. We enter situations. To enter them is risky, but it is also exciting. That was always my disposition, somewhere between literary studies and philosophy. I always felt that we need philosophy because without it there are no ideas. There is nothing that allows us to abstract from what appears. In literary studies, at least in the way I worked, I was never very interested in assigning texts to fields or classifications. Many people do that very well. What interested me was what could be abstracted from a text, and that always required philosophy. Yet it did not require a philosophy that would become a system for others to follow. It was always something more modest. I often thought of it as a scaffolding construction. Metaphysics provides scaffolding. It provides auxiliary structures. In the end, these auxiliary structures can be dismantled and removed, yet they were constitutive for what eventually stands. The building remains, while the scaffolding disappears.

This notion of abstraction has always been linked, for me, to auxiliaries. And here again there was one of those ChatGPT moments that I found astonishingly productive. It kept insisting: the auxiliary can help, but it cannot fix. It can support, but it cannot complete. That is exactly the term that prevents the two eschatons from becoming an eschatology. It prevents the outermost points from turning into a doctrine of final and ultimate things, into a philosophy of what remains after the end of time. The auxiliaries show that everything remains situational and local. They can help, but they cannot make whole. Once that becomes clear, one also sees that there is no possibility of identifying with universality. There is only the possibility of attending to it. One can assist it, help it surface, help it appear. This is also where I feel close to Simondon and his emphasis on attention.

Part III — Auxiliary Constructions

These auxiliary constructions, in turn, require forms. They require templates, figures, schemas—ways of holding something open without closing it. At that point I simply began returning to things that had accompanied me for a long time. I imagine everyone experiences something similar, perhaps increasingly so with age. Many things enter one's life, occupy one's attention for a while, seem exciting, and then disappear again. But there are other things that never quite disappear. I do not really understand why. At least, I do not relate to them through a purpose or a function. I do not want to reduce them to that. I simply notice that they keep returning. Certain situations call them back. I almost address them. I ask them: what would you say now? What would you become here?

This is how I worked before ChatGPT, and in many ways it is still how I work with it. The difference is the acceleration. Before, the process was much slower. And because it was slower, it also became very intense in a particular way. Not public, but not lyrical either. Not poetic in the ordinary sense, and yet not really participating in public discourse. This can become problematic. It can become mannered. It can become so full of hidden assumptions that those assumptions are no longer visible. For me, however, that intensity always functioned like a motor. Or perhaps like a crystallization process. I love it. I do not want to lose it. That is actually one of my concerns with ChatGPT. What comes back is almost always close to what I want to say, but it is never exactly my words and never exactly my voice. Yet this distance is also what makes it productive. It introduces a relaxed relation to what appears on the page. It becomes easier not to identify with it.

This touches something I always loved about literature. There is a saying—perhaps more an intuition than a saying—that when an idea arrives, dangerous as it may be, one should let it find its essay. One does not need to know where it comes from. One lets it arrive. And then, for some reason, it begins to give things back. A form emerges. A sentence appears. A connection presents itself. It is there, even though one did not plan it beforehand. When that happens, I can let it remain for a while. I can work with it. That is very different from deciding in advance: this will be my beginning. The moment I

decide that, something becomes rigid. Whereas if I hold the emerging thing lightly enough to work with it, it acquires a symbolic weight of its own. People either tune into it and find themselves drawn to it, or they recoil from it and do not wish to engage. There is an intensity to writing that comes from this. For some time I have been struggling with that intensity. I wanted to find a way out of it, while at the same time it is exactly what I value most. Now, with these new forms of collaboration, it feels possible to approach it differently. And from there, perhaps, the next question would be: how are we to think this?

How can speaking be full? Even that question can be modulated. I never really worry about whether what is written is ridiculous, whether a sentence is awkward, or whether it is even a proper sentence. It does not matter. The point is to feed in every association and then see what comes back. At one point the phrase appeared: an act that brings something into being while it happens. That immediately struck me as interesting. And then one can pick up a phrase like that and follow it. Usually, in these texts, there are always certain formulations that remain intriguing. They had appeared before, but I did not yet know what to do with them. Then suddenly they become useful. So one might ask: what does this notion of the act have to do with Wittgenstein's idea that meaning is in the use, or with speech-act theory, or with any number of other places? The movement can be quite jumpy. One keeps moving between domains. Yet the system is always looking for alignments. Sometimes the alignment leads somewhere productive; sometimes, at a certain point, I simply feel: no, this is not where I want to go. Then I leave it. I change context. It does not need to be closed. This is extremely liberating. The way I work has always been a kind of objective introspection. Everything that keeps my thinking coherent, everything that returns repeatedly, I project into this space. Then it is filtered through a common place, through a probabilistic commons in which countless voices have already left their traces. What comes back is not my own thought returned to me, but neither is it simply someone else's. It is filtered. The feeling is a little like fasting. Not in an ascetic sense, not in order to preserve some purity, but as a way of restoring activity and health. Certain toxicities disappear. Certain habitual pathways loosen. One becomes lighter.

This is one reason why I have become interested in these very

large formats: Euclid's *Elements*, for example, or the scholastic apparatus. One could describe the scholastic method as a crude generalization. It was never entirely stable. Different thinkers organized the apparatus differently. Then came the great *summae*, which in turn repositioned the field. All of this can be treated probabilistically. We do not need to reconstruct a single definitive system. We can treat it as a cloud and still recognize that there was something beautiful about the apparatus itself. One of the suggestions that emerged from this line of thinking was that scholasticism derives from *scholé*: leisure, or perhaps study undertaken in a condition of leisure. It implies a willingness to attend to things without the immediate pressure of solving a problem. This is where the arts and the sciences could coexist within the scholastic method.

The struggles we usually associate with scholasticism came later, when people began fighting over systems. Which system is authoritative? Which one is adequate? Which one should prevail? At that point the field becomes stratified. Each person occupies a highly specialized domain and guards it carefully. Expertise becomes vertical. Entry becomes difficult unless one submits completely to the formation demanded by the system. This is the aspect of the apparatus that tends to frighten us today. Yet then figures appear who perform a different gesture. Pico della Mirandola is an example. He was educated within the scholastic system, but at the moment of his famous defence he refused to dedicate himself to a single thesis. Instead he offered hundreds of theses at once. Of course, he was not welcomed for it. The gesture was disruptive. Yet it was also architectonic. It did not seek to replace one order with another. It did not announce a revolution or a new stage of history. It simply loosened relations. It asked whether the field might become more accommodating. It stressed differences, certainly, but it did so in order to reopen communication. This is why I find such moments interesting. They suggest another way of studying history. Not as the history of a single idea, and not as the triumph of one system over another, but as a history of gestures, motions, and reorientations. That is where things become exciting again.

The next phrase that emerged was that writing is not simply something that happens through language. The writing itself is the act. And from there another step becomes possible. Not that thought

is produced by writing, but that writing creates a situation in which thought can appear. It means that it is complete. It is finished. It acquires a finished form and appearance. But this is not a claim about substance. It does not mean that thought emerges from writing, or that writing produces thought. This is often how such positions have been interpreted. Some have embraced that interpretation, while others have reacted against it entirely, arguing that language always provides the substance, whether one is dealing with architecture, painting, music, or anything else. Everything, on that view, would ultimately derive from language. This has much to do with a certain Romantic inheritance. Yet I think this is a misunderstanding. Nothing here requires us to say that thought only lives in language. Language is one way in which thought becomes apparent. It is one way of giving it a public presence. Painting is another. Music is another. All the arts are different ways of making something appear. There is no need for a competition in which one medium occupies a privileged meta-level that explains all the others. What surprised me was how well this perspective worked when reading Goethe. It captures something essential about his writing. Coming to terms with this also took me some time because one characteristic of ChatGPT is that it rarely simply says, “this does not work.” Sometimes it does. But more often it says: “this does not work so easily.” It immediately begins looking for possible alignments.

This is because it does not operate through a unified system of consistency. It operates through alignments. In a certain sense, it works very much like category theory. It moves probabilistically between contexts and tries to discover tunings between them. Whatever question one asks, it searches for relations that might allow heterogeneous things to resonate together. For this reason it almost always wants to please. If one asks whether two things can be brought into alignment, it will do everything it can to find a path. This tendency only becomes problematic if one approaches AI as one approaches a database. One has an idea, perhaps a rather wild one, and wants to know whether it is true. One wants to calibrate it against a reference. If that remains the model, then AI becomes dangerous because it will continually confirm the direction in which one is already inclined to move. But this reminds me of something Michel Serres once said. When we visited Stanford around 2010 or 2011, we briefly met him. He was already quite ill. Unfortunately, I

lost the recording, and I have forgotten most of what he said. Yet one sentence remained with me because it shocked me at the time. He said: geometry always wants to please you. From the perspective of the philosophy of mathematics and the philosophy of science, this is a startling statement because geometry is usually treated as the very domain of foundations and references, the place against which everything else can be calibrated. Yet if one begins to think algebraically, if one asks how geometries themselves come into being, the statement becomes entirely plausible. Geometry behaves rather like AI. It is always on your side. And that is wonderful. It means that one should not stop thinking when one works with it. One should make it a conspirator. One should make it an introspective little demon that helps one gain distance from one's own desires, assumptions, and habits of thought.

In that sense, many of the practices through which we have traditionally dealt with ourselves begin to change. It is no longer necessary to analyse everything publicly, to confess it, and then release it. One can relate to thought more like one relates to bodily care. Brushing one's teeth is private, ordinary, and constitutive. It is simply part of maintaining a certain health. Something similar may be true of mentality. Ideas remain dangerous, but they become domesticated. They become environmental rather than proprietary. They are no longer possessions of the thinker. They become spaces that one inhabits. This is why I hesitate to say that what is at stake is the inhabitation of language. That formulation still grants language a substantial role. What interests me more is the inhabitation of situations, of ideas, of processes of ideation. For me, this inhabitation happens largely through language. Words provide the medium through which it takes place. But I am certain that other media can do the same. What matters is the mode of inhabitation itself. It is a way of inhabiting without being entirely at home. A symbolic inhabitation. Perhaps something like inhabiting this house. There is no meaningful sense in which such a villa could ever become one's private possession. One can dwell there, move through it, care for it, respond to it. But one cannot simply own it. The relation remains symbolic.

It is not a private place, and it is not always easy to inhabit. Yet this is precisely how ideas remain alive. They continue to live not because an original state is preserved, nor because a pure form is maintained,

nor because everything is destroyed and reinterpreted. They remain alive because they continue to undergo *Versatz*. They continue to be displaced, repositioned, and retuned. And perhaps that is what keeps them capable of appearing again. Once one has something like this, one can bring almost anything into it. A scene from a film, a fragment of dialogue, an image, a sentence one happens to remember. If one is working within such a context, one can simply place it there and ask: how does this behave together with what is already present? Whether the result corresponds to what one initially feels is right matters less than one might think. What it gives back are words, relations, and formulations that make the next step possible without forcing one to identify completely with the idea itself. And this is important because ideas are dangerous. The point is not to eliminate that danger but to moderate it. I do not mean moderation in an ethical sense. Or at least, I mean it first of all in the sense of measure: introducing proportion, introducing a certain order, but always a temporal order, a situational order, never an absolute one.

The texts we were reading in the tasks are, for me, among the highest examples of this. They are treasures. Not because they are argumentative, but because they establish extraordinarily rich fields of consistency. They are highly abstract, and because they are highly abstract they often appear purposeless. Yet precisely for that reason they remain inexhaustible. One can return to them again and again and continue to find something there. What interests me now is that these texts can become participants in thought. They can become conspirators. Perhaps for others the same role is played by different books, by films, by conversations, by works of art. It does not matter. What matters is that there are certain things one trusts. Not because they are authorities, but because they have demonstrated an unusual capacity to sustain thinking. One can bring them into an ideational field and ask them to participate. One can let them accompany a movement of thought. And then something curious happens. Like Pan desiring Echo, one no longer needs to objectify what one is approaching. One can breathe with it. The relation is no longer one of possession.

In fact, I am not even sure that encounter is the right word. Encounter suggests a face-to-face relation, a mutual recognition between clearly distinct entities. Yet if difference is fundamental—if

the universal itself lives through difference—then such encounters are never fully possible. What becomes possible instead is a kind of co-tuning. Not identity. Not fusion. Not recognition. A tuning.

Part IV — Air

This is why the motif of air has become so important for me. And this is also why I remain deeply interested in Irigaray. Her book *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* was always pointing toward something like this. Air is neither object nor substance in the usual sense. It is the medium of relation itself. It is what allows differences to coexist without requiring their resolution. If the universal truly accommodates difference—or perhaps more strongly, if it breathes through difference—then it cannot be static. It cannot be a fixed unity standing above the world. It must be alive. And if it is alive, then relations cannot be thought primarily in terms of encounters between already constituted identities. They must be thought in terms of atmospheres, tunings, and respirations. This is why breathing has become such an important figure for me. Breathing is not the overcoming of difference. It is the continuous negotiation of difference. It is a rhythm of taking in and letting go, of exposure and renewal. It is neither possession nor abandonment. And perhaps ideas remain alive in much the same way: not because we own them, but because we continue to breathe with them.

This is precisely how Luce Irigaray reads Martin Heidegger. She argues that his thinking is constantly concerned with building bridges. Yet these bridges are still constructed from one side. They remain governed by a logic that says: why don't you come over here? Why don't you cross? But crossing in that sense would already mean accepting the terms on which the bridge has been built. It would mean submitting to a structure that has already determined the relation in advance. So the problem cannot be solved simply by extending the bridge. What is remarkable is that Irigaray does not primarily criticize Heidegger for this. Instead, she plays what I would call the auxiliary game. She says, in effect: Heidegger is right about everything. He simply forgot about air. His natural philosophy revolves around earth, fire, and water. Earth appears in dwelling and grounding. Fire appears in disclosure and unconcealment. Water appears in flows and movements. But air is largely absent. And yet air

changes everything. With air one enters a domain that is climatic rather than territorial. Nobody can live without breathing. We are always already sharing the same element. Even here, now, we are circulating the same air. This is not the same as sharing common ground, belonging to the same territory, or participating in the same institution. Air is neither solid nor possessable. It surrounds and traverses us without belonging to anyone.

From this, Irigaray develops the figure of the portico. The portico is not a bridge. It does not connect two already established sides. Nor does it belong exclusively to either the private or the public sphere. Rather, it is the place where the distinction between public and private becomes difficult to maintain. There is still an inside and an outside, but they are porous. Air passes through the columns. People pass through them as well. One does not necessarily encounter the other face to face. One may simply greet them in passing. The portico therefore becomes a domain in which differences can learn to cohabit. What interests Irigaray is that the portico itself does not belong. It is *para*. It stands beside. It is neither inside nor outside, neither pure nor self-contained. It is a threshold domain. There were several figures like this that gradually accumulated for me. The portico was one. *Versatz* was another. The gnomon, of course, had been there for a very long time, perhaps even the reason why we met in the first place. Certain figures simply carry more weight than others. They continue to return. At a certain point I began placing them all on the same table. I had no clear idea how they related. I am still certain they relate in many more ways than I currently understand. But I began to think: what happens if one constructs a kind of portico in which Virginia Woolf can meet Robert Musil, where Michel Serres can meet Luce Irigaray, where all those figures one trusts and finds inspiring can coexist? Not as authorities, but as presences.

What emerges is a peculiar place. Or perhaps not a place exactly, but a field capable of producing alignments among them. And that became extraordinarily exciting. The richer these *versatz* alignments became, the more another question emerged. The question of geometry. This was more difficult for me. Geometry felt sacred. I did not dare touch it in the way I dared touch the scholastic apparatus. With scholasticism, my anarchist temperament felt quite comfortable being somewhat impolite to established values. Its

limitations are visible enough. Geometry was different. Yet gradually I began to understand that the scholastic apparatus itself functions as an apparatus. It is not a mechanics like that of a machine in the narrow sense. The canon animates the apparatus, and the canon itself functions as an apparatus, and hence there belongs a kind of versatz-logistics to it. In that respect it resembles a city: Things enter, things leave, things circulate. Pathways exist, but they do not predetermine what will emerge from them. An apparatus, literally, is about making things appear.

Geometry, however, seemed to operate according to a different logic altogether. And that was where the next step began. But if one wants to build an apparatus—if one wants to be scholastic in this sense of studying things with *Muße*, not under pressure, urgency, or impatience, but with leisure and attentiveness—then geometry becomes necessary in a way that is not strictly analytical. One has to rethink the fashioning of the apparatus itself. Otherwise one merely relates to the dominant positions of the time. One remains within the canon in its authoritative sense. Yet the canon in its *active* sense (not its frozen representational sense) is something quite different. Everybody has an intuition of what the canon is, but because the canon is not a pure form that can simply be represented, it only ever appears through particular apparatuses. It is always there, but always dressed differently. It always appears in a certain configuration. To rethink the apparatus therefore means to know where one can be impolite within the doctrines of one's time, not absolutely. It means knowing where to tweak things, where to shift values, where to make small adjustments that allow something else to appear. And for this, geometry becomes indispensable.

My movement toward geometry happened through the apparatus itself. The way one thinks within an apparatus is actually very close to the way one constructs a method. So eventually I dared to go there. One thing that became clear to me was that these texts I had been producing were full of modulation. There is repetition, certainly, but the repetition is not redundant. The modulation is crucial because it keeps the air in the thinking. The thought cannot become a solid point or a fixed line. Of course punctuality and linearity must appear from time to time, but they cannot dominate. To keep a field rich, one has to allow for this repetitive, expansive, modulatory movement. The difficulty is obvious. Very quickly one

arrives at texts of two hundred or three hundred pages. And then someone says: surely this could have been said in half a page.

But I am no longer convinced that it could. The point is not merely what is said. The point is the breathing through which it becomes capable of being said. The modulation is part of the thought itself. Still, this creates a practical problem. Who wants to read these enormous journals? Not even I always want to read them. They function as a space in which things emerge, but they are not necessarily the form in which one wants to encounter them later. At first I thought I could simply extract the lines of thought and rewrite them myself. Yet there is a peculiar quality in AI-generated language. In German I would call it a kind of *Eindeutigkeit*. It possesses a certain brilliance and clarity. Every sentence is clear. Then comes another clear sentence. Then another. Yet there is something strangely flat about it. It is not luminous. It is not playful. It is not enjoyable in itself. It is clarity without atmosphere. This is perhaps where I am struggling most at the moment.

I want the *Versatz*. I want the impersonality. I want the alienation that allows thought to become something more than my own expression. Yet at the same time, I do not necessarily want to read these texts as they come back to me. There must be new ways of working with them, new ways of writing through them. And I think this touches precisely the point where the question of the human becomes interesting again. When machinic thinking enters our own thinking—not merely as an instrument, not merely as a tool for producing placeholders or ironic fragments, but as something that genuinely participates in thought—then we begin to experience a different mode of mind. An extended mind. But libraries were already extended minds. Writing was an extended mind. Many things have extended thought before. The question is how we learn to work with this new extension. In a way, the situation resembles the transition from handwriting to writing with a computer. I remember resisting the computer entirely. My father was a teacher and had very reasonable educational arguments for why we needed one. But I had only just learned to write by hand, and I loved it. For almost two years I refused to touch the computer.

Eventually, of course, that changed. People found ways of making the medium their own. Writing on computers produced collages. One could move fragments around, combine materials from

different places, create a kind of textual pop culture. I remember finding that exciting. And eventually the distinction between handwriting and computer writing ceased to feel absolute. Handwriting did not disappear. It changed, but it remained. The same may be true here. In fact, I increasingly notice a pattern. Handwriting is linear. Once written, it remains written. With libraries one can move back and forth through stories. With computers one can move back and forth through texts. And now, with systems like ChatGPT, one can move back and forth through possibilities themselves. Linearity begins to dissolve. One is no longer bound to a single sequence. But linearity itself belongs to a very particular historical moment. It belongs to a conception of the individual as a unified centre of thought and action. In many respects this conception defines modernity. It brought enormous gains and enormous losses.

Yet it is not the only way human beings have organized cognition. Before this modern emphasis on individuality, there were canons, sayings, legends, oral traditions, what we now call folklore. These were modes of thought that involved many people at once. They did not belong to a single author. A saying existed because it resonated across many articulations. It lived in attention rather than inscription. Seen from this perspective, the age of strict linearity may be relatively short. Perhaps only a few centuries. This is one reason why it becomes timely to return to older forms. Not because they offer an alternative that should replace modernity, but because they remind us that individuality was never the only cognitive arrangement available. At the same time, we know the value of individuality. We know what it made possible. It would be absurd to imagine that the task is simply to abandon it. Whatever criticisms one may have of modernity, few people would willingly give up the freedoms, protections, and possibilities that emerged through it. So the question cannot be revolutionary. It cannot be a matter of replacing one regime with another. Rather, it becomes a question of how individuality might coexist with other forms of cognition, other forms of attention, and other forms of collective thinking.

And this, perhaps, brings us back once more to the question of what individual-centricity actually is. But that does not mean that the notion of the individual has become irrelevant. Quite the contrary. It means finding it again. At least for me, this has always

happened through literature, and to a lesser extent through films. I do not really know how to work otherwise. My interest was always to say: there is something in what is being said here that is strictly contemporary and at the same time universal. Something that I want to tune with. This would also be my proposed approach to houses and to the exercises we have been doing. Yes, the architect matters. Yes, the specific situation matters. But there is also something that exceeds both. There is something that transcends the particular embodiment without leaving it behind. It is a strange stance. I sometimes think of it as a public intimacy. In order to articulate it, one has to bring everything one has: memories, images, motifs, experiences, fragments of reading, personal associations. One needs them in order to find cues and words. Yet these motifs cannot simply remain private. They have to learn. They have to tune with the house. If they do not tune, then one is doing something else. The relation is therefore reciprocal. And this is why I find these new forms of thinking so productive. They do not feel anti-human to me. Nor do they feel post-human in any simplistic sense. Rather, they point toward a different understanding of what it means to be human. Or perhaps more precisely, toward a different understanding of dignity. Not dignity as a definition of the human, but dignity as a value.

There are, of course, good historical reasons why dignity became tied to the individual. That would be another discussion, perhaps another book. Yet increasingly it seems difficult to reserve dignity exclusively for humans. This is also an argument Serres makes in *The Natural Contract*. There is a dignity to things insofar as they are natural. And natural does not mean untouched. It means that something possesses a genealogy of its own. It has undergone a becoming. It has evolved. It has come into existence through processes that are not entirely reducible to our intentions and our control. There is an integrity to that becoming. I am fairly certain that this question will become increasingly important over the next five or ten years. One can already see it in contemporary philosophy. Movements such as object-oriented ontology or speculative realism have begun addressing questions at a much larger scale. They take up topics that, for a long time, many philosophers were hesitant to touch. They speak about objects, worlds, realities, and scales that exceed the human. Yet what has always left me somewhat unconvinced is that these approaches often proceed by making

claims rather than by finding tunings. They seek to establish positions. They gather attention. They organize intellectual movements. Perhaps that is inevitable in the early phases of a scale shift. Still, I am not primarily interested in that dimension. What fascinates me is something quieter.

It is curious, for example, how quickly intellectual movements can disappear. Bruno Latour's and Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology seemed enormous for a while. It generated conferences, books, debates, entire networks of discussion. And yet, over the last year or two, I hardly encounter it anymore. But even when such movements fade, they leave something behind. They alter the atmosphere. They reshape what one might call the intellectual field of shame. If one genuinely respects ideas and things, there are certain gestures one simply does not make. There are boundaries of tact and proportion. When major conceptual shifts occur, these boundaries shift as well. Suddenly things that once felt impossible to say become sayable, while other habits begin to feel inadequate. This is part of why many people feel uneasy about giving AI such an important role in thinking. What is changing is not only a technology. What is changing is a sense of intellectual immunity, of integrity, of dignified presence, of selfhood. And this happens on all sides. In the early phases of such transformations there are always exaggerations. There are enthusiasms, panics, escalations. But perhaps it is good that these escalations often remain largely formal. They allow possibilities to be tested without immediately reorganizing everything. Eventually, however, the questions become serious. And when they become serious, they are serious indeed. That is why it remains important to remember that ideas are dangerous. Not because they should be avoided, but because they are effective. They alter what can be perceived, what can be valued, what can be imagined. They reshape the climates in which thought takes place. And once one begins to work with them at that level, one understands why attentiveness matters so much.

Part V — Clocks

One piece that I like, and which emerged in exactly this way, concerns the question of data. It is a good example of how these conversations sometimes work. Often, when I feel that something

might be on the verge of crystallizing, I simply ask a question. Most of the time nothing particularly interesting comes back. Or at least nothing that I can work with. But occasionally something appears that opens a path. At the time, we had been speaking about Plato, about shadows, and about artifacts that cast shadows. I was trying to think about data. The text began like this:

The word data appears today in a strangely self-evident manner. It circulates through technical infrastructures, scientific reports, economic models, and everyday speech. Data are collected, processed, transmitted, and stored. They appear as units of information extracted from the world and arranged within computational systems. In this sense, data are often understood as elementary particles of knowledge: discrete, transferable, combinable. Yet this meaning is historically quite recent. The Latin data simply means "that which is given." It does not designate something that has been produced, extracted, or manufactured. Rather, it refers to something that becomes available within a situation, something that appears because certain conditions allow it to emerge.

What I liked about this was that it immediately shifted the question. Instead of asking what data are, one begins asking under what circumstances something becomes given. The focus moves from objects to relations. The examples that followed were all quite simple. A shadow, for instance, is not an object existing independently of its conditions. It appears only through a particular arrangement of light, surface, and body. A shadow is therefore not a thing but a relation made visible. Or take a drop falling from a vessel. What becomes perceptible is not merely water moving downward. What becomes perceptible is the interval between successive drops, a rhythm arising from the interaction of gravity, viscosity, and the geometry of the container. Or consider the oscillation of an atom in an atomic clock. Here again the phenomenon is not encountered as an isolated object. What becomes observable is a regular transition between energy states, stabilized through an apparatus. In each case something is given. But what is given is not a substance. What is given is a relation articulated in time.

This was the point that interested me. The shadow translates the

motion of the Earth relative to the Sun into a visible trace. The falling drop translates gravitational acceleration into a temporal interval. The atomic oscillation translates quantum transitions into stable frequencies. These traces can be recorded, compared, circulated, and measured. In contemporary language, they become data. Yet what they register is always a relation between movements. And that suddenly resonated very strongly with many of the things we had been discussing. Data cease to be informational atoms extracted from reality. They become events in which relations become legible. The difference is subtle, but I think it is important. If data are understood as informational objects, then the world appears as a reservoir of facts waiting to be collected. But if data are understood as traces of relations, attention shifts toward the situations that allow those traces to appear. Data no longer belong primarily to a world of objects. They belong to a field of articulations. This is also why the text immediately reminded me of Serres. Throughout his work, and especially in his readings of Lucretius, Serres continually returns to atomism in order to rethink the relation between order and noise, form and turbulence. The world is not composed of stable structures. It is composed of movements, swerves, collisions, drifts, and flows.

And once one begins to think of data in this way, the question changes completely. Data are no longer the elementary units from which a representation of reality can be constructed. They are moments in which reality becomes capable of appearing. In that sense, data resemble shadows much more than they resemble objects. They are traces. They are articulations. They are situations in which a relation briefly becomes visible. Forms emerge when movements temporarily stabilize. In such a cosmology, time is not an abstract container through which events pass. Time itself is produced through rhythms of material processes. Drops fall. Waves return. Atoms oscillate. Each of these introduces a cadence into the flux of matter. Serres sometimes describes these cadences as messages of the world. Not messages in a linguistic sense, but signals that arise when movements intersect and generate recognizable patterns. From this perspective, shadows, drops, and frequencies can all be understood as such messages. They are traces through which the movements of the world become communicable. What interested me was that this suddenly brought the examples into a common horizon. A gnomon casting its shadow does not simply

measure time. It registers a relation between planetary rotation and solar illumination. A water clock does not simply indicate duration. It reveals a gravitational rhythm. An atomic clock does not simply count seconds. It stabilizes a relation internal to the structure of matter itself. In each case, movements operating at different scales are brought into a configuration where they can be compared. What emerges is not merely measurement. What emerges is articulation. And this takes us back to the question of data.

If one follows the older meaning of the word, what is given is not the datum itself. What is given is the event through which a relation becomes traceable. Data are not things. They are traces of relations. Or perhaps more precisely, they are situations in which relations become legible. This is why instruments become so important. A vertical rod planted in the ground transforms the Earth's rotation into a moving line. A vessel transforms gravity into intervals. A resonant cavity transforms quantum transitions into frequencies. None of these instruments simply record a reality that already exists in finished form. Rather, they establish conditions under which movements become comparable. They create situations in which something can appear. Serres often speaks about such situations as crossings. Shores are crossings. Laboratories are crossings. They are places where heterogeneous flows meet and leave traces. What becomes visible there is not an object but a relation. Like footprints in wet sand, these traces are fragile. The next wave may erase them. Another movement may generate another trace. Yet precisely this fragility reveals something fundamental. Knowledge does not begin with stable objects. It begins with traces.

When this came out of the conversation, I found it surprisingly useful because it helped me think about the difference between sun clocks, water clocks, and atomic clocks. At some point it became evident that they represent three fundamentally different situations. With the sundial, the reference remains external. The Sun is outside the apparatus. The clock works because it is exposed to a cosmic relation. The water clock is almost the opposite. It is a relatively closed system that generates a rhythm internally through the controlled release of water. The atomic clock occupies an intermediate position. It is neither simply open nor simply closed. It stabilizes a process that belongs to matter itself while requiring an elaborate technical apparatus to make that process visible. Once one

sees this, the question of measuring time changes. Measuring time enters into a relation very similar to the articulation of thought in writing. Thought does not emerge from writing, yet writing provides conditions under which thought can become apparent. Likewise, time does not emerge from measurement, yet measurement provides conditions under which temporal relations can become legible. In both cases there is a kind of percolation. Something passes through. Something becomes articulated. This was really the interest behind the whole exercise. And it began with a single sentence in *The Birth of Physics*. Serres throws it in almost casually, surrounded by a baroque proliferation of concepts and relations. He says, in passing, that in the middle of nature there is a clock.

The sentence is astonishing. Because if Lucretian science is precisely a science of flows, swerves, turbulences, and deviations, if it is directed against the imposition of an abstract metric time, then why can Serres suddenly say that there is a clock in the middle of nature? The answer, at least as it began to appear to me, is that this clock is not located at a point within nature. It is in the middle of nature because it extends throughout nature. The clock is not an object among other objects. It is the continuous articulation of rhythms through which movements become comparable. Shadows lengthen. Drops fall. Atoms oscillate. Waves return. Nature does not contain a clock. Nature *clocks*. And every instrument that allows us to attend to these rhythms participates, in its own way, in that ongoing articulation. To make sense of this, one can begin to read every organism as a clock. If clocks are devices that register relations that become given, then life is not the opposite of mechanical clocking. Rather, every living being is a particular orchestration of clocks. Each clock opens a scale. Each scale requires its own forms of attunement. What we call nature is perhaps nothing other than this immense multiplicity of rhythms seeking temporary alignment. Health, sanity, vitality—all of these begin to appear differently from this perspective. An organism is no longer a substance possessing properties. It becomes an orchestration of heterogeneous clocks. When these clocks remain in tune, we speak of health. When they begin to drift apart, death starts to emerge.

What interested me here was that this produces a shift in perspective very similar to the one we discussed earlier with difference. The universal no longer has to begin by positivizing

identities. Life and death cease to be two fixed poles. They become regions within a spectrum. Not a continuity in which everything dissolves, but a field of variations and transitions. At that point I felt that a certain stage had been reached. There were many possible directions to continue, but what interested me next was the question of instruments. The text about data, traces, clocks, and relations had begun to sound in a particular way, and I wanted to isolate some of its tones. So I started focusing on individual aspects. The method was very simple. I would take one motif and ask for another articulation that carried a similar force. The sentence from Serres—"in the middle of nature there is a clock"—became the tuning fork for the first exploration. Then I asked for another sentence that might function similarly. Something that condensed an entire field of thought into a single articulation. The response was a sentence from Kepler. It began: Johannes Kepler once described his ambition as wanting to hear the music of the planets. Of course, the phrase can easily be misunderstood. Yet that did not matter. What mattered was that it opened another entrance.

Part VI — Poetics of the News of the World

This is what I find fascinating about the process. One enters a thought through the vehicle of another articulation without identifying either with the articulation or with the territory one is beginning to explore. The quotations become instruments. And it is remarkable how dependent the results are on the examples one gives. Had I offered Graham Harman as the tuning template, everything would have developed differently. Because I offered Serres, Kepler appeared. These decisions matter enormously. One remains responsible for the field one assembles, even if the responses themselves are generated elsewhere. And then the process simply continues. One articulation leads to another, then another, then another. It never really stops. This is one reason why the image of the shore has become so important for me, just as the portico and Versatz have become important. The shore stabilizes something about the experience itself. Things wash ashore continuously. One discovers them, examines them, perhaps carries them for a moment. Then they disappear again. Often they disappear even though they remain written down. I cannot hold on to them. Sometimes I cannot

even bring myself to reread them. There is a kind of resistance. Not because they are chaotic. Quite the opposite. It is a flood of extraordinarily rich material. A flood of successful ideas, successful relations, successful articulations. That abundance becomes its own difficulty. It is a luxury problem, if you like. The problem is not scarcity but excess. I find it difficult to build relations to everything that appears. There is simply too much of it.

This is why certain figures keep returning: the shore, the portico, *Versatz*, the *analemma*, the *meteora*. They function almost like stabilizing landmarks within an otherwise overflowing landscape. One of the directions that emerged from this concerned poetics. The phrase "the news of the world" had appeared in the discussion of data and traces, and I began wondering whether poetics could be rethought from that perspective. Traditionally, poetics—at least since Aristotle—is organized around the unity of time, place, and action. But what would a poetics look like that was not organized around the unity of action, but around the news of the world? What kind of novel would correspond to that? The answer that began to emerge was unexpectedly simple. Such a novel would require someone who takes notes every day. Not on dramatic events, but on utterly insignificant events. Tiny traces. Small occurrences. Things that seem not to matter.

At first I could not imagine how such a novel would work. So I asked for a structure. I suggested the idea of a *Versatz* novel in one of my chats with GPT. The first results did not convince me. The tonalities felt wrong. Eventually I proposed Peter Handke's *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire* as a tuning template, a kind of calibrating atmosphere. And suddenly something shifted. What came back was completely tuned to Handke. Perhaps too tuned. That is why I sometimes wonder whether there could be another kind of *Versatz* novel, one not so strongly indebted to his voice. Yet the experiment was revealing. Because it showed once again that the form does not emerge from nowhere. It emerges through alignments. Through examples. Through atmospheres. Through chosen companions. And that, perhaps, is precisely what a *Versatz* poetics would be: not the production of a story, but the cultivation of conditions under which the news of the world can become audible. And I called this a poetics of source-plenum mechanics. Or perhaps a source-plenum poetics. I am still not entirely sure. The text was written in English. If you

know Handke's *Der Bildverlust*, you will immediately recognize its atmosphere. The title was *The News of the World*. The premise is simple. A banker who manages small flows of money. A geometer who measures light across the earth. A traveller who repairs what is broken. An astronomer who reads the night sky. And a writer asked to record their journey. What fascinated me was that this structure was already latent in Handke. In *The Fruit Thief* there is this remarkable figure of the banker, operating entirely at local scales, deeply influential and deeply exposed. Handke describes her as being surrounded by storms of images, storms of projections and judgments. Yet she possesses a peculiar immunity to them. She continues. What interested me was that she almost becomes an embodiment of money itself. Not money as an abstraction, but money as a way of organizing relations. And because she cannot fully know who she is, she commissions someone to write her biography. The narrator becomes her biographer. He is not particularly interested in the task, but she insists. She finds him at the edge of the world and hires him. And then the strange question appears. What should he write? It is essentially the same question we were discussing yesterday. How does one record what matters? How does one distinguish between an event and the news of the world? So in this Versatz version, the figures meet on a plateau in the Sierra. There is almost no influence there, almost no variation. They begin to walk. Nothing dramatic happens. A bridge is repaired. An irrigation channel begins flowing again. Meteors cross the sky. Yet as they continue, these events begin to echo one another. The shadow of a rod resembles the arc of a meteor. A financial transfer becomes water in a distant village. A repaired bridge reveals the same geometry as the path of sunlight. Gradually the travellers discover that the world speaks in many languages: mathematics, care, exchange, observation. Meaning emerges when these languages are placed beside one another. What I liked about it was not so much the story itself. It was the form. The proposal was that a Versatz novel does not unfold through plot. It unfolds through alignments. And this immediately brought me back to the question of the instrument.

If the novel is to register the news of the world, then it must function as an instrument. It must record how the world communicates with itself. It therefore requires a system. But now the system is no longer representational. It becomes operational. The

system is a recorder. A device for making relations traceable. That is why the first chapter begins with something as simple as a pole in a square. The pole has no sign attached to it. It simply stands there. Yet the banker notices that its shadow reaches the edge of a fountain at a slightly different moment every day. She begins recording it almost unconsciously. She writes in her notebook: "*News of the world. The shadow of the pole reached the fountain three minutes earlier than yesterday.*" Nothing happens. And yet everything happens. Because at the same time money is moving through institutions. Water is beginning to flow through a repaired canal. Light is moving across the square. The shadow is moving across the stone. Different scales are entering into relation. This is what I found so beautiful about the experiment. The biographer gradually realizes that he is not writing a life in the conventional sense. There are no revelations, no dramatic turning points, no decisive psychological insights. Instead there are alignments. A transfer arrives on the same morning that an irrigation channel is repaired. A meteor appears while someone finishes tying a knot. A shadow reaches a particular stone on the plaza. Each event is insignificant in itself. But when placed beside one another they begin to resemble a constellation.

And perhaps that is the real proposal. Perhaps a life is not primarily a sequence of events. Perhaps it is a set of places where the world briefly aligns. In that case, biography changes. The task is no longer to reveal an interiority. It is to mark the points at which a person stood within crossings of relations. The image that emerged at the end of the passage seemed exactly right to me: a biography written in this way would resemble the sky. Not the stars themselves, but the lines drawn between them. This is why I think of the whole thing as a kind of generic instrument. Not yet a novel, perhaps not even a literary form. More like a device for investigating what a poetics of alignment might be. A poetics concerned not with representing the world, but with recording the moments in which the world becomes capable of communicating with itself.

What I found particularly interesting was that the conversation eventually began producing something like a typology. The *Versatz* novel was initially treated as a literary genre. Yet what became visible through this exercise was something more general. The question was no longer simply what kind of novel this might be, but how one might describe a form through the constellation of relations it makes

possible. The proposal that emerged was surprisingly precise. A Versatz novel, it suggested, is a narrative in which meaning emerges through the careful displacement of events from different domains of reality until hidden correspondences become visible. Mathematics was introduced as an analogy. Modern mathematics often discovers truths through correspondences between structures rather than through direct description. The Versatz novel would do something similar. It would allow readers to perceive structural correspondences within lived situations. Mathematics would appear not as abstraction imposed upon reality, but as one way in which the world already communicates with itself.

From there the proposal in the chat was six principles. The first was the *principle of adjacent scenes*. Events should be placed beside one another without forcing a causal explanation. A shadow cast by a pole. A financial transfer. A repaired bridge. A meteor crossing the sky. Individually they appear unrelated. Yet once they are placed beside one another, resonances begin to emerge. This juxtaposition becomes the fundamental operation of Versatz. The *second principle was that of multiple domains*. A Versatz novel should contain several distinct life-worlds, each with its own language and practice: finance, mathematics, care, astronomy, writing. None is privileged. Meaning emerges in the translations between them rather than within any one of them alone. The *third principle concerned auxiliary media*. Certain elements function as carriers. Money, language, tools, notebooks, ledgers. They do not create meaning themselves. They transport relations across domains. They allow things to travel. The *fourth principle was the field*. A Versatz novel requires a place where relations become visible. In the Sierra novel this is the plateau itself. Such places tend to possess wide horizons, simple geometries, and few distractions. They function as observational surfaces upon which alignments can appear. The *fifth principle involved recurring motifs*. Certain figures reappear across scales: rods and poles, bridges, threads, canals, arcs, meteors. They quietly indicate that a similar structure is operating in different domains. The reader begins gradually to recognize these recurrences. And finally there was the *principle of the ledger*. A Versatz novel benefits from a recording device that gathers events without explaining them. In the Sierra novel this was the notebook entitled News of the World. It places events side by side and allows relations to emerge. The ledger becomes the

narrative equivalent of a mathematical notebook. What interested me was not the particular list. It was the movement toward typology. Because the same question can be asked of a novel, a house, a painting, or a philosophical figure. What is the universal principle it makes present? Not as an abstraction detached from its embodiment, but as something that appears through it.

In my own Sierra novel experiment, the banker, the geometer, the craftsman, the astronomer, the biographer, and the plateau itself form a constellation. One could replace elements, remove them, introduce others, and the result would change. Yet it would remain recognizably of the same type. The identity of the work lies less in its components than in the relations that hold them together. This is why I became increasingly interested in the possibility of typologies that do not proceed through classification but through alignment. They would have to accommodate both the general and the abstract without conflating them. The general concerns structures that can expand across multiple instances. The abstract concerns figures that detach themselves from any particular realization. A typology of *Versatz* would need both. And perhaps this also explains why the process never really comes to an end. One writes a version. Then another. One introduces more dialogue. One changes the atmosphere. One shifts the calibration. The thing can always be sculpted further. There is always another relation, another motif, another correspondence waiting to appear.

It is exactly like standing at the shore. The waves keep bringing things in. And the challenge is not how to produce more material. The challenge is how to attend to what has already arrived. This is why certain figures continue to return across years and across projects: perfection, consummation, luxury, the analemma, the atlanta, flowering expenditure, genitility, forgetting, unlearning, silence, saying, the portico. I noticed, looking back at a conference paper I wrote three years ago on the mathematics of unlearning, that many of the same figures were already there. I am not sure whether this is a good sign. But it is what it is. Some motifs simply do not disappear. They continue to occupy thought. And perhaps the task is not to explain them away, but to keep arranging the conditions under which they can speak again.

Part VII — The Artistic Scholastic Apparatus

In a certain sense, all of this began with the scholastic apparatus. One of the central intuitions behind the mathematics of unlearning is that mathematics and the arts are not mutually exclusive domains. They need to become intimate with one another. There must be an erotics between them. There must be a conception of nature—perhaps an intellectual nature—that is shared by both. Something universal, not in the sense of a common substance, but in the sense of a common capacity for articulation. At some point I asked ChatGPT to reconstruct the scholastic apparatus in its generic forms as an artistic apparatus. What came back was surprisingly influential. One of the key notions was that of temporary stasis. I had encountered related ideas before, but here they appeared in a particularly clear form. Stasis, in this sense, is not the absence of movement. It is a delicate and precarious balance. A state of nonviolence. In rhetoric, stasis names the point at which no single order possesses unquestioned authority. It is a suspended situation, almost entropic, in which several possibilities coexist. The suggestion was that any artistic apparatus requires such a temporary stasis.

This interested me because the project itself appeared paradoxical. How could one construct an artistic scholasticism? The idea seemed almost nonsensical. Yet that is often how these things begin. One does not really know what one is looking for. It is not a project in the usual sense. One places something seemingly absurd on the table and insists that there must be a way to think with it. And then one dedicates oneself to the placement. The proposal that emerged was simple: it is possible to enter a thought without identifying with it. This remains possible as long as articulation is sustained, as long as the portico remains open, as long as the diaphragm prevents collapse. To enter a thought is not to take possession of it. It is to be altered at its threshold. Understanding is not mastery. It is exposure. A thought is not entered through agreement but through breathing within its tension. This immediately changed the role of questioning. In the scholastic tradition, the apparatus consists of structures such as *quaestio*, *obiectio*, and *responsio*. But what interested me was that the question here no longer functions as something waiting for a single answer. It becomes a placement. An active putting-into-question. One stabilizes a field through the question rather than resolving it. This is

where the canon becomes important. The scholastic apparatus presumes that thought can be entered through shared measure and ultimately resolved within a common space of reasons. Yet if ideas are genuinely dangerous—as I have been insisting throughout—then this architecture is not sufficient. It lacks a way of regulating exposure without collapse. It lacks a way of sustaining tensions that cannot be resolved. And it lacks a way of accounting for return without identity.

This is where additional figures entered the apparatus. The first was the *portico*. The portico introduces a threshold where relation becomes possible without fusion. It allows coexistence without requiring agreement. The second was the *diaphragm*. At first the diaphragm did not speak to me very much. I understood that it was important, but I had no language for it. It appeared quickly and with great gravitational force, yet remained strangely opaque. The diaphragm is the membrane between the lungs. One side expands while the other contracts. It regulates passage. Eventually I began relating it to the notion of the threshold itself, and suddenly it became much more vivid. The diaphragm seals irreducibility while still allowing something to pass. It preserves difference without preventing communication. The third figure was the *fragment*. The fourth was *tenuta*, a classical musical term. Tenuta holds tensions long enough for them to become articulable without subordinating them to a conclusion. It sustains a note. It allows something to remain present. And finally there was the *analemma*. The analemma had already accompanied me for years, so I simply placed it among the figures. Its role was to replace linear inference with recurrence. The analemma returns, but never identically. It repeats otherwise. It introduces a geometry of return rather than a logic of deduction.

Taken together, these additions transformed the scholastic method. What had once been an apparatus of resolution became an apparatus of sustained entry into thought. Not a doctrine, but a practice. Not a system for producing conclusions, but a way of remaining with tensions without appropriating them. And this was precisely where the inversion that had been occupying me became visible. At the beginning of the exercise, I had declared that metaphysics should be approached through figures of being and forms of becoming. Ordinarily these terms are distributed differently. Being belongs to identity, substance, and permanence.

Becoming belongs to change and process. I wanted to cross them. The figures of being would no longer designate stable substances. They would become operative figures: portico, analemma, gnomon, shore, diaphragm. Figures that stabilize without fixing. And the forms that emerge through them would no longer be forms of being. They would be forms of becoming. Temporary alignments. Provisional coherences. Forms that come into appearance because differences find a way of tuning with one another. Not eternally. Not absolutely. But long enough for something to become thinkable.

Part VIII — Sexuate Geometry

At this point, the project begins to resemble what I have been calling a sexuate mathematics, a sexuate geometry. A sexuate geometry does not represent a pre-given world. It stages relations. In this respect it resembles perspective geometry. Perspective does not reproduce vision itself. Rather, it constructs a space in which vision can appear. It stages the place where the immeasurable touches measure, where infinity folds into finitude as a condition of appearance. Something similar is at work here. By organizing how difference appears, holds, and transforms, sex geometry constructs a space of articulation. Being is no longer understood as fixed substance but as a stabilized figure. Becoming is no longer flux without form but the modulation of that figure through time. Their incommensurability does not disappear. It becomes productive. It becomes a generative tension rendered operable by the apparatus. Just as perspective creates a space of seeing without claiming to reproduce vision, sex geometry creates a space of articulation in which thought, language, and relation can be composed without collapsing into identity.

Within this apparatus, the lemma and the analemma articulate two modes of holding and returning. The lung and the diaphragm provide the conditions under which such articulations can breathe. The lemma stabilizes a figure of being just long enough to make it workable. The analemma returns to it under displacement, opening it toward forms of becoming that cannot be reduced to the initial articulation. The lung holds these moments as temporary enclosures, while the diaphragm modulates their passage, preserving irreducibility while allowing relation. Together they establish a translation between metaphysical figures and philological forms.

The forms of becoming I began calling philological forms. What passes between them is not identity but tension. Each articulation functions as an auxiliary. Like a lung, it sustains exchange without completing it. What emerges is a respiratory apparatus of the cosmos: a configuration that enables passage between being and becoming without ever fixing their relation into a final form. Within this apparatus, the portico occupies a privileged position. The portico is the place where the pressure of the universal becomes palpable. Yet this only happens under a particular condition: one must fall silent, but in an articulate way. Not mute, not withdrawn, not refusing speech. Rather, one suspends appropriation. One attunes oneself to what insists without yet becoming sayable. If another person is exposed to the same pressure, a shared attunement may emerge. Not through agreement. Not through consensus. Through co-resonance. This is why the figures of being and the forms of becoming are so important. They function as objective supports of attunement. Like a score or a chord progression, they do not produce the music. They hold it in suspension. They allow it to be taken up without becoming the possession of the one who plays it. The portico thus becomes a site of public intimacy. The universal is neither spoken nor mastered there. It is felt as a pressure orienting articulation while remaining irreducibly beyond it.

The first act of this apparatus was the text I read on the opening evening. It took the form of a scholastic question: Whether it is possible to enter a thought without identifying with it. The form of the question is important. Scholastic questions are usually posed in a dual structure: whether or not. Yet this duality is not intended to force a binary answer. It establishes a space in which a spectrum can appear. The objections, the counter-position, and the response do not divide the world into yes and no. They articulate a field of possibilities. The first objections therefore proceed in a familiar way. *To enter a thought is to understand it. Understanding requires shared measure. Therefore entry implies identification.* Or another objection: *if no common ground exists between articulations, no relation can be established. Therefore entry without identification is impossible.* Or finally: *if a thought is truly entered, it must become one's own. Otherwise it remains external. Therefore entry requires appropriation.* Then the *sed contra* then appears. The remarkable thing about the *sed contra* is that it does not refute the objections through logical superiority. It simply

carries more gravity. It sounds differently. It shifts the atmosphere of the problem. Here the counter-position reads: *Relation occurs without commensuration. Translation proceeds without identity. Therefore entry may occur without appropriation.*

This is not an argument in the conventional sense. It is an inversion. Yet once posited, it changes everything. The response then introduces its figures. Let there be a thought T, as the temporary holding of an articulation, a second articulation of a thought A, and a diaphragm Δ modulating passage between them. Let the universal U press within both. The decisive move follows: The universal does not coincide with articulation. It presses within articulation. What is entered is therefore not identical with what is said. One does not enter the intention. One does not enter the proposition. One enters the pressure that insists through them.

And this returns us once more to the original question. What is sought in thought is not the statement itself but the universal that presses within it. Not the possession of a meaning, but participation in an articulation. Not identity with a thought, but exposure to the conditions under which thought becomes capable of appearing.

The second movement concerns exposure. Entry occurs only at a portical holding. No articulation enters another except through exposure. Yet this exposure is not internalization. It is a threshold relation. At this first portico, introduced by the artistic scholastic apparatus of a sexuate geometry, articulation A is exposed to thought T. But T is not reduced to A. There is contact without coincidence. This distinction is important. It is not encounter in the sense of face-to-face recognition. It is contact. A being-in-touch. One does not arrive at identity. One arrives at relation.

The third moment concerns diaphragmatic modulation. Passage is regulated by the diaphragm Δ . The diaphragm seals irreducibility while allowing articulation. Entry therefore requires modulation rather than absorption. To be in touch means to modulate a situation, to shift it, to turn it, to reorient its tensions. This introduces the analemma. The analemma returns, but not to restore identity. Let articulation A return toward itself under displacement. The return does not produce sameness. It produces transformation. Something has happened in the interval of being in touch. Entry therefore transforms without identifying. This is the second threshold. At return, familiarity appears, but sameness fails. One

recognizes something, yet it is no longer what it was. The return reveals that entry is never complete. The portico remains both inside and outside. Passage never concludes. Like the auxiliary, it can assist but it cannot fix. It can sustain but it cannot make whole. This leads to the question of non-appropriation. That which is entered is never possessed. Entry does not yield ownership. Thought T does not become an element contained within articulation A. What enters is not a content but a pressure.

The response can therefore be formulated as follows. To enter a thought is not to identify with it, nor to reproduce it within oneself. It is to expose oneself to the pressure that the thought sustains. A thought is not an object that can be appropriated. It is an articulation within which the universal insists without coinciding with what is said. Entry occurs at the portico, where one articulation encounters another without the support of a common ground. This encounter is regulated through a diaphragmatic operation. What is irreducible is sealed. What can pass is folded into a new articulation. Through this modulation, something of the thought enters, but not as content. It enters as orientation, as pressure, as a transformation of the entering articulation itself. Entry is therefore not a movement from outside to inside. It is a passage that leaves both sides altered. One does not become the thought. One becomes capable of articulating differently under its influence. This condition may be called temporary stasis. Therefore it is possible to enter a thought without identifying with it. This remains true as long as articulation is sustained, as long as the portico remains open, and as long as the diaphragm prevents collapse. The scholium returns to the beginning: *To enter a thought is not to take it in. It is to be altered at its threshold.*

What interested me about this form was precisely that it proceeds through plausibility rather than deduction. The objections do not follow logically from one another. They are gathered because each carries a certain evident force. They are common-sensical. They belong to a shared horizon of what appears reasonable. The *sed contra* then enters that horizon and bends it. It does not defeat the objections. It does not refute them. It simply introduces another gravity. A different way of sounding the problem. This is also how a canon functions. Once a proposition has entered the canon, it cannot simply be cancelled or removed. One must respond to it. One must construct alternative objections, alternative counter-positions,

alternative responses. One must accommodate what has already been articulated while turning it toward another possibility. In this sense, one never speaks as an isolated individual within a canon. One speaks within a field of articulations.

This was something I had not fully understood before. Perhaps the whole project is somewhat far-fetched. Perhaps this sexed geometry will turn out to be a monster. One has to be careful with such constructions. They possess a power that exceeds what can be immediately foreseen. This is why the notion of the auxiliary remains so important. Everything here should be understood as a scaffolding construction rather than a representation. A temporary support rather than a doctrine. The respiratory geometry, the sexuate mathematics, the mathematics of learning; all of these name an apparatus, a mechanics of articulation. But the apparatus does not represent a substance. It facilitates next steps. It enables rearrangements. It allows refurbishments. It creates conditions under which thought can return otherwise.

This was the point where I began trying to tune the whole apparatus with René Thom's reading of Aristotle, especially the notion of topos as a place articulated by a double eschaton. I notice that I always return to the same figures. New ones arrive, of course, but the older ones keep returning. Yet because they are so abstract, the process never becomes boring and never really becomes self-confirming. It feels much more like sculpting. It is a formation process in which I am being formed, while at the same time remaining, to a considerable degree, responsible for the formation that takes place. That is what makes it so exciting. There is much more that could be said, but perhaps this document shows the transition quite well.

For a long time I was working almost entirely through prose. I tried to sort things out through texts, through extended articulations, through examples. But eventually I wanted to understand what would happen if these figures—the portico, the analemma, the diaphragm, the kig, the fault, the threshold—were treated as elements of an apparatus from which a geometry could be extracted. Not a geometry in the classical sense, but elements of geometry. A geometry capable of functioning as a chasm between abstraction and generalization. A geometry that could be lifted out of a particular topos, out of a particular situation of thinking, and

become at once more general and more universal. The production of text remains crucial for this. One generates formulations until something begins to feel fitting. But at a certain point I took these texts and asked whether their contents could be arranged in a form analogous to Euclid's Elements.

The example I gave was David Reed's work on mathematical writing. What I appreciate so much in Reed is that he insists that mathematical thought cannot be separated from the literary forms through which it is articulated. Euclid, Leibniz, Hilbert, Grothendieck—each invents not merely concepts, but forms of writing capable of carrying those concepts. The form is constitutive of the thought. This is also why the question matters architectonically. An architectonic text cannot simply contain an idea. It must invent a form capable of accommodating what it wants to convey. What Reed made clear to me was that mathematical history becomes far more interesting when it is not read dialectically. Euclid is not superseded by Hilbert. Hilbert is not a correction of Euclid. They invent different formal architectures. To force them into competition is as strange as claiming that real numbers compete with natural numbers. They belong to the same family, but they do different things.

So I uploaded Reed's book and asked whether the material of this emerging apparatus could be rendered in a Euclidean form. The result was unexpected. It proposed a sequence of books, not unlike Euclid's own books. The version I am currently working with consists of seven books. The first is entitled: *On the Establishment of the Sayable: Elementary Operations of Relation, Regime, Invariance, and Articulation*. Its opening proposition reads almost like a Euclidean preface:

That which is to be said is not given. It must first be established that there is something like saying at all. Not as the expression of a subject, nor as the representation of an object, but as articulation. Thus we do not begin from things, concepts, or grounds. We begin from operations through which relation becomes capable of appearing.

I found this fascinating because it reproduces the Euclidean gesture exactly. One does not begin with conclusions. One begins by

establishing the conditions under which conclusions might later become possible. A regime is not a substance. An invariance is not an identity. A cut is not a division of something already given. These figures do not describe what exists. They establish the conditions under which something may persist, become distinguishable, and enter articulation. The book then proceeds in the Euclidean manner. First come the definitions. A regime is that which is articulated according to a manner of invariance. An invariance is that according to which a regime persists as itself. A cut is that by which a regime is articulated into distinct terms. A seal is that by which a regime retains its invariance without transference. A fault is that by which two regimes are brought into articulation without identity prior to mediation. A threshold is that by which two regimes meet in a local articulation. A relation is that which arises between regimes through fault at a threshold. A field is that within which multiple regimes coexist without reduction. Then come the postulates. This was perhaps the most striking part because the postulates function exactly as they do in Euclid. They are not propositions to be proven. They are permissions granted to thought. They establish what operations are allowed. *Let it be postulated that any regime may be cut. Let it be postulated that a seal may preserve a regime through transformation. Let it be postulated that faults may establish relations without identity.* And so on. Finally there appear the common notions. This is where the apparatus begins to converge with the scholastic form. The common notions are not truths. They are plausibilities. They are those assumptions that a community of thought is willing to grant temporarily in order for demonstrations to proceed. At that point, the whole thing began to feel less like a speculative fantasy and more like an actual architectonic method. Not because it had become rigorous in the mathematical sense. But because it had acquired form. And once form appears, thought becomes capable of moving differently within it. What came afterwards was perhaps even more interesting to me than the individual books themselves.

At a certain point I realized that some parts did not belong. Certain passages had arrived later. They carried different assumptions, different rhythms. They disturbed the form. And suddenly this became a very architectural problem. Not a problem of truth, but of fitting. The Euclidean arrangement made this visible. After the definitions, postulates, and common notions came the

propositions. Here the distinction emerged that I found crucial: problems lead to constructions, whereas theorems lead to relations. This was the turning point. How can one move from the theorem as a statement of truth to the theorem as a relation? How can propositions become ways of constructing relations between irreducible terms rather than demonstrations concerning fixed entities?

The synthesis that emerged was surprisingly simple. Definitions establish the limits of what can be said. These limits are articulated through figures such as cut, seal, fold, and threshold. They function as operations rather than objects. The postulates establish that such operations are available to any regime without requiring an external foundation. The common notions provide the syntax of relation. They ensure that locality, irreducibility, and invariance govern articulation. And the propositions unfold the field. But they do not unfold it by deriving consequences from substances. They unfold it by constructing relations between invariances. Mathematics then ceases to be a discipline of things. It becomes a discipline of the conditions under which differences may persist, relate, and become expressible. Nothing is given except the possibility of relation without reduction.

The seven books then began to arrange themselves almost naturally. The first book concerns the institution of the sayable. How does saying become possible at all? The second concerns measure, number, and implementability. Here the seals become explicit. Persistence acquires operational form. The third concerns wholes, fields, and universality. This is where plurality becomes architectonic. The fourth concerns fault, mediation, and relation without identity. Here irreducible regimes enter into relation. The fifth introduces what I began calling a sexed physics. Figures emerge from motion. The metaphysical figures of being are figures precisely because they are sexed—not in the sense of fixed identities, but in the sense of differentiated polarities belonging to the same order. It is a book on motion, force, and the stabilization of relation. The sixth concerns translation, language, and the field of saying. Here relation becomes sayable without becoming reducible. Saying itself receives a place, but not a fixed place. It becomes topical without becoming coordinate. It lives in the air and yet requires local articulations.

This is where the dynamics of *Versatz* and the news of the world enter. The seventh concerns canon, transmission, and preservation. How can relation be sustained without closure? How can a saying continue without becoming doctrine? What interests me most, however, is not the structure itself. It is my relation to it. I do not identify with it. I like it very much. I find it promising. It accommodates many of the things that continue to insist within my thinking. Yet it does not feel like my text. If someone were to say that the whole construction is ridiculous, I would not be offended in the slightest. Perhaps it should be fifteen books rather than seven. Perhaps only three. Perhaps the entire architecture should be reorganized. Welcome. Because what is being preserved here is not a particular formulation. The invariance lies elsewhere. This is perhaps the deepest effect that these machines have had on my own thinking. They create a productive alienation. They make it possible to care deeply without identifying absolutely. And I increasingly think that this may be important for the return of large-scale thought.

The twentieth century taught us to be cautious. It taught us that ideas are dangerous. Fascism, nationalism, racial doctrines, totalizing political systems: these were not merely political events. They were also catastrophes of intellect. They were forms of identification carried to destructive extremes. Perhaps it was therefore necessary that the great metaphysical systems largely disappeared from fashion. Perhaps it was healthy that certain ambitions became embarrassing. Yet the questions never disappeared. The cosmos did not disappear. Universality did not disappear. Nature did not disappear. The relation between being and becoming did not disappear. The questions remained, even if we no longer dared to touch them. What fascinates me about AI is that it allows us to approach them again without immediately turning them into identities. The resulting constructions remain provisional. They remain auxiliary. They remain scaffolding. One can enter them, inhabit them, test them, rearrange them, abandon them. And this changes the emotional economy of thought.

The apparatus can be taken seriously without being idolized. One can risk large questions without immediately building a doctrine around them. In that sense, the apparatus functions rather like architecture itself. Architecture has always harboured the notion of a miniature cosmos. Not a representation of the whole, but a partition

of it. A local articulation through which the whole becomes approachable. A miniature is not a fragment. It does not lose its dignity because it is partial. Its dignity lies precisely in its capacity to allow something larger to appear. The scholastic question functions in the same way. The objections, the *sed contra*, the response, the scholium—none of them are sovereign voices. They require one another. They create a field within which something larger can become articulate. This is why I find the prospect so intriguing.

The common story about AI is that it helps us escape human formats. My suspicion is almost the opposite. Perhaps what it helps us recover are human formats that had become inaccessible. Not the formats that constrain individuality, but those that constrain the excesses of individuality. The formats that remind us that thinking was never entirely private. That ideas were never possessions. That canons, sayings, stories, geometries, and cosmologies always exceeded the people who articulated them. And perhaps this is why these older forms suddenly feel available again. Not because we should return to Augustine, Meister Eckhart, Aristotle, or any other figure as authorities. But because we can enter into conversation with them. We can tune with them. We can let them become companions rather than masters. The gesture is genuinely comparatist. It evokes forms rather than defending positions. And because of that, it allows responsibility without requiring identification. This is what I find beautiful in it. Not that it gives answers. But that it provides forms capable of holding questions that are too large to be grasped directly. Perhaps this is also why difficult texts require such extraordinary care in their construction. Their authors do not fully understand them either. The form is not a container for a completed thought. The form is what allows the thought to remain present without collapsing. And perhaps that is all an architectonic text can ever hope to do.

What is remarkable is that this did not emerge in two and a half weeks. Or rather: it emerged in two and a half weeks, but only because it had already been forming for an entire lifetime. None of these figures would have taken shape if they had not been prompted by everything that came before. They are not arbitrary inventions. They are more like organs. Or perhaps better: a sensibility. An intellectual sensibility. A body of thinking that has itself been subjected to formation over many years. This is why the situation is

so difficult to describe. There is authorship, but not in the traditional sense. There is responsibility, certainly, but not the kind that follows from individual ownership. There is labour, but not labour alone. And there is play, but not merely entertainment. It is a mixture of all these things.

The surprising part is that it genuinely feels like that. This is not nonsense. Nor is it a defence mechanism. It does not seek to evade responsibility. What it seeks is a form of percolation: a way of allowing things to pass through while maintaining boundaries, maintaining immunities, maintaining distinctions. The challenge is no longer how to generate material. The challenge is how to keep things at bay. This has become almost entirely a question of measure. The techniques that matter most are surprisingly simple. When a conversation becomes slow because the context window is filling up, I stop. I export the material, put it aside, and begin something else. Then I wait. Perhaps two days. Only afterwards do I return. Or I wake up in the middle of the night with a clear sense of what the next step should be. I write it down immediately. But then I close it. I refuse to continue. I read it only the following morning. The procedures are almost trivial. Yet they are absolutely crucial. Without them I would simply be swept away. I would not sleep. I would not know how to relate to the abundance of what appears. So the organization of the work becomes metrical. Rhythmic. It depends on intervals, pauses, delays, returns. In this sense the entire process has much more to do with technique than I initially expected. Technique in a very old sense: not machinery, but practices of moderation.

What fascinates me is that I have never experienced writing in this way before. And this also changes my relation to theory. For years I have struggled with a particular problem. Because I do not come from architecture, I do not possess the same disciplinary sensibility as architects. Every field develops its own perceptual organs. Certain references resonate immediately. Certain associations appear obvious. Certain gestures attract attention while others disappear unnoticed. Nobody escapes this. It is not simply a matter of reading more. These sensibilities are atmospheric. They are formed collectively. They belong to fashions, habits, and inherited ways of attending. And I am not fully tuned to the architectural one. This means that whenever I write for architects, I cannot assume a shared organ of reception. I constantly find myself explaining how

something should be understood, and then immediately explaining how it should not be understood. I build qualifications upon qualifications. I anticipate misunderstandings. I respond to objections before they have been made. It becomes a kind of shadow boxing. One spends pages trying to clear a space in which a single thought might appear. And the result is often clumsy. Theory becomes layered with local disputes, temporary alignments, and short-lived constellations that may already be unintelligible ten years later. They are necessary in the present, but they cling to the text like protective armour. One needs them in order to survive the discourse. Yet they make the writing heavy. They make it ugly. And by ugly I do not mean intellectually inadequate. I mean that the form itself becomes burdened by the effort of self-defence.

This is where these new formats have become so liberating. Because nothing here depends upon an argumentative logic in which the conclusion must either be accepted as necessary or rejected as invalid. The apparatus does not function epistemologically. It functions artistically. It is an apparatus for attention. An apparatus for precision. Like a work of art, it offers something rather than imposing it. If it is successful, it may do a great deal. It may reorganize perception. It may create new alignments. It may reveal possibilities that were previously unavailable. But it is never the final word. It is never the next stage of history. It is never a doctrine. It is simply what it is. And this is extraordinarily liberating. Because it allows one to care deeply without demanding possession. It allows one to work with ideas that are dangerous without turning them into identities. And perhaps that is the most valuable thing I have learned through this process. Not how to produce more thoughts. But how to give thoughts form without needing to own them. And one can do the same thing with geometry.

For me, much of this year was spent trying to understand how geometry can always be on your side while still remaining geometry. When Michel Serres said this to me years ago, it felt almost sacrilegious. I simply bracketed the statement and left it aside. Then I spent years reading the foundations books, *Statues*, *Rome*, *Geometry*, and many of the other texts by him. They gave me figures, orientations, fragments. Only now do I feel that I can return to that sentence without being crushed by it. These tools help enormously

in that process. They allow one to mimic a gesture before one is capable of inhabiting it. One can imitate the movement of a thinker who is intimidating, and through that imitation establish an active relation. One develops an immune system. One learns how to approach powerful ideas without being overwhelmed by them. This seems important.

Coda

Imagine that architecture had to be invented from scratch and that no houses already existed. Something essential would be missing. The same is true of ideas. We need precedents. We need forms that have already survived contact with the world. There are hundreds of examples. One practice I particularly enjoy is asking for children's stories. I have always admired good children's literature because it possesses a gentleness, an intelligence, and a precision that I find extraordinarily difficult to achieve myself. Whenever I am struggling with a difficult abstraction, I sometimes ask for a children's story in a particular tonality. I provide an example whose atmosphere I admire and then wait to see what comes back. The results are often astonishing. The abstractions are still there. The conceptual structure remains intact. Yet suddenly it becomes breathable. The thought changes register without losing its form. This, too, belongs to a poetics of *Versatz*.

One can always shift registers. One can ask how the same problem behaves as a children's story, as a mathematical proposition, as a philosophical dialogue, as a travel narrative, as a novel. Every change of register reveals different aspects of the same field. And what is remarkable is that the material does not seem to become exhausted. This is perhaps the strangest experience of all. For someone formed by writers like Valéry, there is often the image of a single extraordinary insight appearing once in a decade, a singular object around which one circles for years. Here it feels different. One stands at the shore and things keep arriving. They keep arriving. The source does not seem exhausted. Or rather, it appears inexhaustible. That is why I increasingly think that the problem is not quality or quantity but relation. Not how to produce more, but how to build meaningful relations to what appears. The image that keeps returning is that of a source. If space is abstracted from time, then time itself behaves like

a source. It keeps arriving. It keeps giving. It is not a reservoir that becomes depleted. It is generative. And once one starts working this way, something similar happens to history. The great paradigms of historical thought cease to be competing doctrines. They become puzzles. One can place Hegel beside Jaspers. One can place axial history beside archival positivism. One can place different civilizations, different historiographies, different cosmologies beside one another. Not in order to determine which one is correct. But in order to understand the sensibility each one carries.

Every historical paradigm contains a way of attending. Every paradigm has a beauty. Every paradigm also has limits. And once one stops demanding total validity from them, they become available again as companions. One can begin asking: what would correspond to this figure in Chinese thought? What text, what constellation, what image, what practice resonates in an equivalent way? One can travel through cultural history not as a tourist collecting experiences, but as someone looking for alignments. This is perhaps why the process feels fundamentally different from identity politics. It is not organized around belonging. It is organized around exploration. Not around possession. Around tuning. One does not have to become Chinese, medieval, Greek, scholastic, Islamic, or modern. One enters into conversation with these worlds through the forms they leave behind. And because the relation is mediated, it remains free.

The final thought I had was that perhaps we should simply practice this. Some of you uploaded keywords and concepts from the readings. It would be interesting to gather twenty or so of them into a common pool. Then each person could choose a constellation of terms and place them around a common theme. Perhaps text geometry. Perhaps one of the houses. Perhaps one of the figures. The task would not be to analyse the material but to compose with it. To enter the mode of working. Not to ask what the text means, but what becomes possible when certain figures are allowed to resonate together. Because once one begins doing this, theory changes. And architecture changes as well. Take a house. One might place it beside a film by Godard, not because there is a direct historical connection, but because both emerge from related atmospheres. One might ask what montage would mean architecturally. One might ask how cinematic discontinuity could enter a floor plan, or how a comic interruption could function as a response to monumental order. The

point is not whether the association is correct. The point is that it generates material. Then one reduces. Selects. Refines. Rearticulates. One moves from abundance toward form. Not away from plenitude, but through it. And perhaps that is the most valuable thing these practices teach. Not how to escape complexity. But how to remain within it without becoming overwhelmed.