

Exceeding Humanism

Aporetic Relations of Hospitality and Parasitism

*Eszter Horváth*¹

We are living all-too-human times, suggested Jean-Luc Nancy, summing up his thoughts on the Covid pandemic in his essay collection entitled *Un trop humain virus (An All-Too-Human Virus)*. He claimed that the pandemic is a symptom of our disequibrated spiritual, not merely biological, life. The virus, literally “breath-taking”, is the most ruthless and brutal manifestation of the breathless spiritlessness of our times, he said, and referred to Nietzsche: it is a human, an “all too human” virus, and there is no doubt that its spread characterizes our civilization, a human civilization that knows no measure and constantly swings from excess to excess. The pandemic is truly “spiritless”, *irrational* by definition, as it knows no measure, it has no *ratio*. The pandemic is irrational, and that is what makes it rampant. It is beyond good and evil (continuing on the Nietzschean path), beyond what we have known as a normative spirit throughout our history.

Nancy experienced the pandemic as a suffocating everyday reality of the lack of spirit: a rampant, uncontrollable “spiritlessness”. Quite literally, we found ourselves in a situation where a brutal, elemental force tore our otherwise comfortably rational world into pieces, revealing the raw truth behind the facade of “organic integrity” and “health”, behind the ideals of the well-organized, the orderly, and the closed structures of reason and reasonable human communities. We found ourselves in a situation where reason was overpowered by raw force. The dethronement of the well-structured organism seemed to be, by the same token, the dethronement of reason: an overflowing spiritlessness beyond the human.

The functioning of the parasite has become emblematic: it parasitized our intellectual and physical lives, an invader, making us realize that our world was undergoing a radical change, that we no longer controlled it – we, humans, the self-proclaimed masters of life and death. During the pandemic we all became “post-humanists” in a more-than-human world, whether we wanted it or not; we became involuntarily involved and could feel the coming of the new world on our own skin, as this other-than human element took control of us.

¹ Budapest Metropolitan University, ehorvath2@metropolitan.hu

The situation created by the parasite has brought to the surface a hidden connection, a hidden truth. As we became aware of the emerging reality, not only our own world but also that of the parasite appeared in a different light. The parasite destroyed, deconstructed, but this deconstruction proved constructive at a certain point: destruction made room for reconstruction. “We must relearn how to breathe and to live, quite simply” stated Nancy immediately after establishing the diagnosis of suffocating, breathless spiritlessness. “Let us be infants. Let us re-create a language. Let us have this courage”² – establishing the diagnosis may be the first step towards healing. However, “healing” by no means implies the restoration of our previous state of health. Instead, it aims for a new form of life which can live on in cooperation with its own time, place, and environment.

For Jean-Luc Nancy, the Covid pandemic was just one of many experiences with such parasites. One significant experience that shaped his life was the unavoidable heart transplant that occurred in 1993, which he later documented in his book titled *The Intruder*. This essayistic account, blending subtle observations with brutally weighty insights, is one of Nancy’s most frequently cited texts, alongside his *Corpus*. The acceptance of a foreign heart, with all its physical and spiritual weight (the life made possible by the Other, who lives on within me), and, further, the infections of a reduced immune system to prevent rejection, the discovery of one’s own microbiome, the multitude of ongoing autoimmune processes – these are the experiences that have defined Nancy’s remaining thirty years and, simultaneously, the continental philosophical tradition. The bodily reality of foreignness, the flesh-and-blood experience, becomes the evidence of the multiplicity of our bodily and spiritual identities. Here, the fundamental human experience becomes posthuman in spirit (even if Nancy himself consciously avoids this term since, within his conceptual framework, all of this is not *post*-human as such, but a fundamentally human experience: the experience of being open to the outside, to the others – the fundamental experience of coexistence). In Nancy’s testimony, the experience of discord and alienation in modernity is replaced by the experience of original multiplicity, and this plurality is not merely the proliferating virtuality of “bodies without organs” (as in the works of Gilles Deleuze), but the living, real, and own body, with all its known and unknown intricacies: like a networked ecological system – an open system.

What a strange self! It is not that they opened me wide [béant] in order to change my heart. It is rather that this gaping openness [béance] cannot be closed. (Each X-ray moreover shows this: the sternum is sewn through with twisted pieces of wire.) I am closed open. There is in fact an opening through which passes

² Jean-Luc Nancy: *An All-Too-Human Virus*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 2021, p. 25.

a stream of unremitting strangeness: the immuno-depressive medication, and others, charged with combatting certain, so-called secondary effects that one does not know how to combat, (such as kidney deterioration); the repeated monitoring and observation; an entire existence set on a new register, swept from top to bottom. Life scanned and reported upon by way of multiple indices, each of which inscribes other possibilities of death. It is thus my self who becomes my own intrus in all these combined and opposing ways. I feel it distinctly; it is much stronger than a sensation: never has the strangeness of my own identity, which I've nonetheless always found so striking, touched me with such acuity. 'I' has clearly become the formal index of an unverifiable and impalpable system of linkages. Between my self and me there has always been a gap of space-time: but now there is the opening of an incision and an immune system that is at odds with itself, forever at cross purposes, irreconcilable.³

So this body – this *corpus* – is open, open to those who establish a connection with it. Open and receptive, devoted, despite all the unpredictability of coexistence, with trust and faith in the future... and as a reader parasitized by the parasite living on this corpus, I cannot myself resist the temptation: I accept it, make it my own, transform it, pass it on, carry it further.

Once again, I seize the opportunity to open Jean-Luc Nancy's *corpus* (*au coeur*, as the French say, literally at the heart) to the rarely, all-too-rarely quoted but omnipresent French connection, the person who introduced the parasite into philosophy, relating it to the everyday experience of multiplicity conceived as parasitic coexistence: Michel Serres is this philosopher, the creator of the epistemological and even ontological model of parasitic relationships. I suggest that his thoughts on parasitism enter in a fruitful dialogue with Nancy's thoughts on the event of the encounter, hostile and hospitable by the same token. Therefore, let me "implant" Serres's parasite, that is, his epistemological reasoning published under the title *The Parasite*⁴, into the depths of Jean-Luc Nancy's experiences, his testimonial texts (*au coeur*...) – aware that the questions raised by coexistence with the parasite touch upon the essence, the "vitality" of our present life experiences. The guiding principle of this delicate operation is: "Aime l'autre qui engendre en toi l'esprit"⁵ – Love the other who begets in you the spirit.

³ Jean-Luc Nancy: L'intrus. In: *The New Centennial Review*, Volume 2, Number 3, Fall 2002, pp. 1–14. Project MUSE - L'intrus (jhu.edu)

⁴ Michel Serres: *Le parasite*. Paris, Ed. Grasset, 1980.

⁵ Michel Serres: *Le tiers-instruit*. Paris, Ed. Francois Bourin, 1991. 87.

1. In Statu Nascendi

Recalling his memories about Michel Serres, Jean-Luc Nancy gave a brief but poignant characterization of him as one of his intellectual companions: “I believe he felt similar to the gadfly or stingray to which Socrates compares himself. Not a Socrates who knows that he knows nothing, but one who knows everything and can know everything without needing to create a system or delve into the anxieties of non-knowledge. A perpetual and spontaneous rebeginning of philosophy. A thinker *in statu nascendi* – just as he saw history always in the process of inventing itself, branching off, mutating, and escaping.”⁶ Michel Serres, follower of Socrates, a nurturing, eternal recommencer who, like his master, spurs the spirit towards continuous renewal: Nancy saw Serres as a whimsically energetic, creative, innovative thinker *in statu nascendi*, a constantly renewing mind.

Michel Serres’s philosophy can truly be read as a fundamental turn in the history of system philosophies: it shakes and breaks the closure of any system. It intrudes into its so-called “autonomous unity”, its independence, postulating interdependent systems, absolute interdisciplinarity, and absolute dialogue between different forms of thought. Thus Serres can be read as the prophet of continuous rebirth, both within and beyond systems; a free spirit who provides passage between systems, opening them towards each other and stimulating communication. It is not by chance that he chooses Hermes as the advocate of his encyclopedic communication theory masterpiece.⁷

The phrase “*in statu nascendi*” appears frequently in Nancy’s late writings – and Nancy himself is a thinker of birth and rebirth, of coming into existence and creation, a creative force, just like Michel Serres. Both are “begetting in beauty,” creative thinkers, and successors of Socrates in the act of creation. Therefore I suggest having a closer look at Socrates’s “begetting”, his maieutic method, as perhaps it can help us understand the work of both his successors, or even the dialogical relationship emerging between their philosophies in recent decades.

The Socratic maieutics is based on the collaboration of participants in the dialogue, working towards a common goal, which is none other than the birth of truth into the world. And let us not forget that truth necessarily comes into the world from “outside the world” – the dialogue enables the reception and understanding of truth that lies beyond the participants’ horizons of knowledge, thus emerging “*in statu nascendi*.” The midwife must reckon with the unknown, and the re-thinker of system philosophies must reckon with the lack of a system, requiring openness

⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy : «Un recommencement primesautier de la philosophie» – Libération (liberation.fr)

⁷The five volumes of the Hermes-quintology: I. *La Communication*. 1968. , II. *L’Interférence*. 1972. , III. *La Traduction*. 1974. , IV. *La Distribution*. 1977. , V. *Le Passage du Nord-Ouest*. 1980.

and, in a certain sense, remaining outside of the system. The midwives of emerging thought systems are not unfamiliar with the lack of a system; on the contrary, their success depends on their ability to effectively collaborate with foreign instances.

2. The Excluded Third Party

Serres's and Nancy's works, especially those dedicated to the parasite case, do not have a "direct" connection. There are no references to each other's texts, no specific debates or dialogues. There is also a significant time lag between the texts. Yet, the dialogue still emerges, and it emerges following the description given by Serres in his interpretation of the Platonic dialogue⁸.

How does successful communication work? The observer might think that in a dialogue there are two opposing parties which communicate. They exchange ideas, argue, or simply share information with each other, facing each other in a back-and-forth process, a two-way communication that presupposes opposing participants. However, Serres sees it differently. According to him, the conversants stand on a common platform, together against a common enemy, and this common enemy is the disruptive, meaningless background noise that pervades the environment of any dialogue. This "background noise" seems to be the fundamental element of communication, since the content of the dialogue becomes audible only against the backdrop of some background noise, emerging and differentiating itself from it. On the other hand, background noise, no matter how necessary for successful message delivery, is inherently disruptive, making communication difficult or even hindering it. Serres's solution to this dilemma is to consider communication as a kind of game in which the speakers play with each other. The basic rule of the game is to form a community, to form an alliance against the disruptive factors (whether they are intruding individuals, impersonal interference phenomena, or intrusive noises – all external factors that disrupt communication).

The conversational partners are far from being opposed to each other; they do not play by the rules of classical dialectics. They are bound together by a common interest, namely, to collectively fight against the external factor (the disruptive background noise) that undermines the act of giving a meaning. The goal of the game: to render this disruptive element irrelevant to their dialogue. So, in the dialogue, the speakers play "together", as a pair, bound against the third one, often exchanging roles or positions during their exchanges or shifting away from their original stance as they move closer to each other. Despite the dynamics of the dialogue, as long as they are "playing the game," the speakers always move together.

⁸ Cf. Michel Serres: *Le dialogue platonicien et la genèse intersubjective de l'abstraction*. In: *Hermès I. La communication*. Paris, Minuit, 1968. 39–46.

Engaging in a dialogue means being together as a pair, but for this, a third party must be postulated, from which their relationship can emerge by differentiating themselves from it. However, it is not enough to postulate; the third party must be identified, sought out, and excluded. The exclusion of the disruptive third party is the key to successful communication. Thus, the most serious problem in communication is not the occasionally contradictory “Other” (as they are just a variation or version of the Same); the genuinely significant problem is the Third. Serres refers to this involved/excluded third party as a “demon” – following the example of Plato’s demon, who similarly, from the outside, forcefully intrudes into the thought process and modifies it. The Demon is the personification of noise, according to Serres⁹; it gives voice to the noise.

Serres’s essay on the platonic dialogue is part of his Hermes quintology, which contains his introductory explorations in communication theory. But the idea of replaying the platonic dialogue continues to haunt his work, up to his *“The Parasite”* published in 1980. The demon, the excluded third party, assumes a new role, a new distribution, fulfilling its task as the disruptive background noise that “sucks” the host body, as biological parasites do, or disrupts friendly gatherings as an unexpected guest. It once again draws attention to the communication-theoretical significance of disruptive background noise. Moreover, background noise, or white noise is commonly referred to as “bruit parasite”, as the playful French terminology admits this term – thus “parasite” becomes a fundamental concept in communication theory. Such metaphorical functioning of parasitism in “normal” scientific communication spontaneously prepares the ground for Serres’s train of thought.

The parasite first appears in a negative light; we view it as a malfunction, an error or noise within a given system. Its emergence triggers the strategy of exclusion. The maintenance of our initial system (our body, environment, worldview) seems primary, and the appearance of the parasite is seen as a potential damage to its integrity, so the parasite must be eliminated. However, this approach ignores the fact that the parasite, like the demon or the third party in dialogue, is an integral part of the system. By experiencing it, the system connects, manages, and integrates it – thus transitioning from a simpler level to a more complex one. Ultimately, the parasite, like Plato’s demon, disturbs the system and ensures its development. The parasite is the fundamental condition for development: in representing disorder, it enables the possibility of order. Ultimately, the parasite from within demonstrates the priority of disorder when it creates a more complex order from disorder and through disorder. It introduces something new: the “parasitism” of the irrational on the rational rewrites the rules of reason. The emergence of new rules relies on the irregular collaboration of the irrational in the playful interaction of reason’s development.

⁹Michel Serres: *Le dialogue platonicien...* 39–46.

3. Parasitic Dynamics

Michel Serres's books are mostly "difficult" texts, and *The Parasite* is no exception. They are irregular, obscure, and layered with increasingly complex strata of literary, scientific, and philosophical texts that serve as the basis for analysis. Guest texts, poetic images, and allegories weave an intricate web of complex meanings. Serres does not simply establish theories about the phenomenon and dimensions of parasitism. Instead, he seeks to demonstrate the parasitic nature inherent in everything, including theory itself – he seeks to show how it works, and how to make it work: the parasite *in actu*. Parasitism becomes a mode of existence where the parasite and the host body cannot be clearly distinguished. We cannot definitively determine where the "illustration" begins and where the discourse of science, logic, or philosophy ends, or by what rules the various genres of guest texts are written upon each other. In *The Parasite* the Book of Genesis, the Acts of the Apostles, the Odyssey, Xenophon, Plato, Molière, and Rousseau's texts intertwine with La Fontaine's thirteen fables. Serres's thoughts penetrate into the network of textual connections along the intricate patterns of interpretation. We could say that Michel Serres reads and writes as a parasite himself, and when reading Serres, it quickly becomes evident that we, too, cannot do otherwise. As readers, we parasitize on the text we read. As writers, we even parasitize on our own interpretation.

The fundamental model of a parasitic relationship is presented in La Fontaine's fable titled "The Town Rat and the Country Rat"¹⁰:

The City Rat and the Country Rat

*A city rat, one night,
Did, with a civil stoop,
A country rat invite
To end a turtle soup.*

*Upon a Turkey carpet
They found the table spread,
And sure I need not harp it
How well the fellows fed.*

*Our rats but fairly quit,
The fearful knocking ceased.
'Return we,' cried the cit,
To finish there our feast.*

*'No,' said the rustic rat;
'To-morrow dine with me.
I'm not offended at
Your feast so grand and free,*

¹⁰ *The Fables of La Fontaine*, translated by Elizur Wright (gutenberg.org)

*The entertainment was
A truly noble one;
But some unlucky cause
Disturb'd it when begun.*

*'For I've no fare resembling;
But then I eat at leisure,
And would not swap, for pleasure
So mix'd with fear and trembling*

*It was a slight rat-tat,
That put their joys to rout;
Out ran the city rat;
His guest, too, scamper'd out.*

[Trans. Elizur Wright]

The guest parasitizes the host, who in turn parasitizes the master by consuming their produce without reciprocation. However, the master is not an independent producer either. Their relationship with the land they cultivate and the animals whose milk they drink and meat they eat is more than problematic. The master is also a parasite, and the relationship is not even one-way, since they parasitize not only on their land but also on their own parasites. When the master of the house enters the scene (perhaps due to the noise of the rat feast), the noise he creates disrupts the feast. The growing background noise changes the existing system, and now it is the human who parasitizes on the rats' feast. In La Fontaine's tale, the noise interrupting the feast also functions as a parasite (thus, the term "bruit parasite" is not an unfounded playfulness in scientific terminology – in La Fontaine's example the expression becomes "literally" understandable).

Parasitism is a relational form where positions cannot be easily determined. Noise is always present beneath every communication channel. A slightly louder or differently sourced noise transforms the meaning of the relationship and creates a new system. The original setup can change at any moment, and since we are never lacking noise sources, it really does change. In the elementary network of the parasitic chain, the three positions interchange to infinity. Thus, instead of the linear model of parasites living off each other, Serres prefers the model of a threefold branching, where all three positions are equivalent, where all three parties are equidistant from each other, and the third is always present.

There is a fundamental relationship between the host body and the parasite, but with every disturbance, every interruption, the basic connection ceases and/or transforms into a new configuration. The parasite becomes a condition for both enabling and disabling every possibility in a system, forcing it to reconfigure itself

each time by excluding the source of disturbance. This means driving out the parasite as a scapegoat and simultaneously designating a new place for it in the game.

What we perceive as a system, potentially as an organization, is not the equilibrium state of “order”. According to Serres, equilibrium is nothing more than a temporary slowdown in the unstoppable process of transformations. Serres does not acknowledge the existence of stable systems, only of “black boxes” that we use as closed forms (hiding their chaotic contents) to temporarily conceal our ignorance – or rather our being without knowledge: the experience in which, like Socrates, we know that we have no knowledge because “objective knowledge” (knowledge thought of as something that we can have, something possessable: objective thinking as an object of thought) does not exist. Knowledge is in continuous transformation, it has no static, orderly, logical equilibrium state because knowledge is dynamic. The parasite is the factor that sets the forms of knowledge in motion, a catalyst, not merely a “paralyzer” that kills the system but rather a liberator from the constraints imposed by ignorance, in the so-called “black box”. It releases the energies suppressed within order.

4. ‘I’ and ‘We’: The Virtuality and Reality of Quasi-Objects

The temporary units of our knowledge are subjected to the energy of the unknown: they are subject-like, or object-like, or, to put it in the terms Serres uses, quasi-subjects and quasi-objects. They are forms of existence on the border between the virtual and the real, more than objectified entities with defined spatio-temporal structures, contours, boundaries, or unique characteristics. They are not ‘real’ objects in the traditional sense, but rather reality-creating relations. The movement of quasi-objects creates the playground in which beings can play their roles, occupy their places, and fulfil their functions according to the rules of the game. Examples of such quasi-objects are the values and symbols that organize our religious, political, and economic lives: the blood sacrifice guiding the cult, the scapegoat (as the ‘excluded third’) ensuring our group identity, money organizing our economies, or – one of Serres’s favourite examples – the ball defining the dynamics of football.

In the dynamics of parasitic relations, participants are constantly changing positions according to the dynamics of the game, like football players (quasi-subjects) whose movements are governed by the motion of the ball (quasi-object). In this game, the familiar order of our personal and communal existence dissolves as the “quasi-” field, de- and reconstructing it as a game of intersubjectivity. Let me quote Serres’s interpretation of the game which coordinates our interdependence:

Philosophy is not always where it is usually foreseen. I learn more on the subject of the subject by playing ball than in Descartes' little room.

While Nausicaa plays ball with her companions on the beach, Ulysses, tossed about by the waves and the undertow, saved from the shipwreck, appears, naked, subject, beneath. Child of the blade, child of the passing of the ball.

This quasi-object that is a marker of the subject is an astonishing constructor of intersubjectivity. We know, through it, how and when we are subjects and when and how we are no longer subjects; *'We': what does that mean? We are precisely the fluctuating moving back and forth of 'I'. The 'I' in the game is a token exchanged.* And this passing, this network of passes, these vicariances of subjects weave the collection. I am I now, a subject, that is to say, exposed to being thrown down, exposed to falling, to being placed beneath the compact mass of the others; then you take the relay, you are substituted for 'I' and become it; later on, it is he who gives it to you, his work done, his danger finished, his part of the collective constructed. The 'we' is made by the bursts and occultations of the 'I'. The 'we' is made by passing the 'I'. By exchanging the 'I'. And by substitution and vicariance of the 'I'.

That immediately appears easy to think about. Everyone carries his stone, and the wall is built. Everyone carries his 'I', and the 'we' is built. This addition is idiotic and resembles a political speech. No. Everything happens as if, in a given group, the 'I', like the 'we', were not divisible. He has the ball, and we don't have it anymore. What must be thought about, in order to calculate the 'we' is, in fact, the passing of the ball. But it is the abandon of the 'I'. Can one's own 'I' be given? There are objects to do so, quasi-objects, quasi-subjects; we don't know whether they are beings or relations, tatters of beings or end of relations. By them, the principle of individuation can be transmitted or can get stuck. There is something there, some movement, that resembles the abandon of sovereignty. The 'we' is not a sum of 'I's, but a novelty produced by legacies, concessions, withdrawals, resignations, of the 'I'. The 'we' is less a set of 'I's than the set of the sets of its transmissions. It appears brutally in drunkenness and ecstasy, both annihilations of the principle of individuation. This ecstasy is easily produced by the quasi-object whose body is slave or object. We remember how it turns around the quasi-object, how the body follows the ball and orients it. We remember the Ptolemaic revolution. It shows that we are capable of ecstasy, of difference from our equilibrium, that we can put our center outside ourselves. The quasi-object is found to have this decentering. From then on, he who holds the quasi-object has the center and governs ecstasy. The speed of passing accelerates him and causes him to exist. Participation is just that and has nothing to do with sharing, at least when it is thought of as a division of parts. Participation is the passing of

the ‘I’ by passing. It is the abandon of my individuality or my being in a quasi-object that is there only to be circulated. It is rigorously the transsubstantiation of being into relation. *Being is abolished for the relation*. Collective ecstasy is the abandon of the ‘I’s on the tissue of relations. This moment is an extremely dangerous one. Everyone is on the edge of his or her inexistence. But the ‘I’ as such is not suppressed. It still circulates, in and by the quasi-object. This thing can be forgotten. It is on the ground, and the one who picks it up and keeps it becomes the only subject, the master, the despot, the god.¹¹

Jean-Luc Nancy’s experience of heart transplantation is the perfect embodiment of Serres’s pass-allegory: in the act of transplantation (the “passing” of the heart), two “selves” encounter and engage in a continuation of life – two selves beyond themselves, in mutual *ex-stasis*, mutually determining each other as subjected to the game. The bodily and spiritual experiences of nearly thirty years following the surgery became the real, bodily experience of coexistence within the parasitic game space described by Serres in 1980. “What a strange self!”, as Nancy wonders about himself in the passage from *The Intruder* that we quoted earlier, “I am closed open” he continues a little later, “It is thus my self who becomes my own intruder in all these combined and opposing ways. I feel it distinctly; it is much stronger than a sensation: never has the strangeness of my own identity, which I’ve nonetheless always found so striking, touched me with such acuity. ‘I’ has clearly become the formal index of an unverifiable and impalpable system of linkages”¹².

5. Noise

Serres tackles the repositioning of birth and genesis itself in the context of his philosophy of “*in statu nascendi*”. His *Genesis* book¹³ explores the ontological and epistemological approach to indistinct multiplicities: mass phenomena, herds, hordes, life forms that populate space and move in groups; the sea, the forest, mists and clouds, raging storms, tumultuous human relationships – multiplicities unaffected by the principle of individuation. They are open, boundless, and expansively undefined. Their movement is irregular, turbulent – a dizzying “noise” that reverberates throughout the text. The old French word “noise” resonates with its multiple meanings obscured by time: noise as clamor, a cacophony of quarrels, chaotic turmoil, murmuring, inseparable from the roaring sea, nausea,

¹¹ Michel Serres: *The Parasite*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1982, p. 228. (Italics mine.)

¹² cf. Nancy, Jean-Luc: *L’intrus*. In: *The New Centennial Review*, Volume 2, Number 3, Fall 2002. Project MUSE - *L’Intrus* (jhu.edu)

¹³ Michel Serres: *Genesis*. University of Michigan Press, 1995.

and dizziness. The book was originally intended to be titled Noise, but *Genesis*, as the term speaks for itself with a striking simplicity, became the chosen title. However, within “genesis,” one can clearly trace the indistinct, primordial, chaotic murmuring reminiscent of beginnings: noise as the background noise of becoming. Serres’s book makes this background noise audible, considering it the basic noise of birth and emergence. It opens up the semantic field of the term “background noise”, conceived as a basic element of communication theory. Previously known as parasitic disturbance of the system, articulated as “noise” in Serres’s *Genesis* the term reaches its ontological dimensions.

It would be a mistake to interpret Serres’s playful, poetic, and profoundly parasitic texts as a contemporary mythology, even if it is Aphrodite who emerges from the roiling primordial sea of *Genesis*, her beauty is the first entity to arise, like a “belle noiseuse” – in Serres’s text it is though the artwork that becomes the primary instance of creation, not divine beauty alone. The key to understanding *Genesis* lies in the interpretation of Balzac’s short story “*The Unknown Masterpiece*” originally titled *La belle noiseuse*, meaning “a beautiful troublemaker”. Serres’s interpretation points to the world-creating nature of artistic creation, the divine detail emerging from the chaotic lines in Frenhofer’s painting – a captivating foot entering existence as the iconic image of the emerging (*in statu nascendi*) work. Mythology is just one of the parasites that fertilize Serres’s thinking (just as it is parasitized in Balzac’s writing, which in its turn is parasitized in Serres’s thinking). As a scholar, Serres is a trained mathematician and as a philosopher he is considered primarily an epistemologist. When he thinks of multiplicities as instances endowed with world-creating power, it is not merely by an excessive poetic freedom driving towards myth-making. With Serres, theory must also have a scientific foundation. The collaboration between the natural sciences, humanities, and arts is of fundamental importance in all of Serres’s work. *The Parasite* and *Genesis* are particularly excellent examples of the revelatory power of inter- and transdisciplinarity. One could say that the natural sciences, humanities, basic and applied sciences, and the various forms of art and poetry all come together in Serres to create the theory of multiplicities... *as* a multiplicity. Thus, it aims to go beyond the objective, external description of the “subject of discourse” and instead focuses on its performative realization, carefully examining and fundamentally transforming the discourse itself. Genre boundaries do not pose obstacles for a parasitic thinker.

There are no boundaries for Michel Serres and Jean-Luc Nancy, thinkers of “coexistence” and “multiplicity”. Their works resonate with each other on multiple levels, establishing connections and forming networks, interacting with and (re) shaping each other parasitically. This network is extensive, by nature, with thinkers

such as Whitehead, Bergson, Deleuze, Derrida, Latour, Haraway (to name just a few of the most active and intensive nodes) shaping contemporary thought within the resonance field that emerges among them. In this constellation, the innovative potential of parasitic thoughts is undeniable.

Is it true that the spirit of our times is dominated by parasitic thinking? As Serres would say, we can experience its analytical, paralytic, and catalytic aspects equally. Personally, here and now, I consider it important to highlight the catalytic effects of “being together”: our coexistence with parasites results in the liberation of innovative and creative forces, which is undoubtedly a promising and forward-looking phenomenon on the diverse palette of contemporary philosophy.

“We must relearn how to breathe and to live, quite simply. Which is a lot, and difficult, and long – children [les enfants] know this. The infantes [‘those without words or speech’, ‘the mute’: Latin plural of *infans*, ‘babe’], don’t know how to speak. They don’t know how to modulate their breath in speech. But they only ask to learn, and they learn and then they speak. Let us be infants. Let us re-create a language. Let us have this courage”¹⁴ – writes the elderly Nancy as the conclusion of his last parasitic experience. Serres, the Socratic philosopher, provides a method to his colleague’s project: the dialogue becomes relevant again through its potential for altering consciousness, becoming the playground or battleground of parasitic philosophy. The connection with the other, the openness to the other, and the thinking together with the Other are the keys to innovation, in the sense of *invention*, that is, the advent, the coming of something fundamentally different. Coexistence, whether it follows the guidance of Jean-Luc Nancy or Michel Serres, necessarily opens up the mind that tends towards closure, allowing the entry of the third, the foreign, the unknown element that carries and develops it further. “Aime l’autre qui engendre en toi l’esprit...”¹⁵ [“Love the other who begets the spirit within you”, trans. EH] – that’s exactly what happens with Nancy and Serres.

Under the unique and total sun, the unity of knowledge glows. At dawn, its light extinguishes the countless multiplicity of different stars. From the East, nothing new. Nothing new since this fire has illuminated us, since the ages of light: since the Greek Sun, the one God and classical science, since Plato, the wisdom of Solomon, Louis the Great, and the Enlightenment, this knowledge of the day had lost time. None of these names, none of these so-called new eras, has ever changed the regime, always the same, of light, unique and timeless.

Here’s something new. No longer naively opposed to the day, like ignorance to knowledge - what a fortunate chance that the nycthemeral rhythm for

¹⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy: *An All-Too-Human Virus*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 2021. p.25.

¹⁵ Michel Serres: *Le tiers-instruit*, Paris Francois Buren, 1991. p.87.

these simple and cruel divisions of error and truth, of science and dreams, of obscurantism and progress! – but seeded with colors and blackness, the night sums up the very days of knowing. Thus, harlequin-like and chromatic, the third instruction, like the previous ones, comes from the night owls of space observatories who blend day with night, which in turn integrates the days of galaxies with the nights of black holes; this mixture engenders a third light.

We have departed from Platonic Good, the age of enlightenment, the exclusive triumph of classical science, the unified history of our forefathers. Never did triumphant religions, glorious politics, the science that believed it was at its zenith when it had barely begun, or an unadulterated history tolerate images of such discretion or restraint, nor the mixture from which time is born.

The age of glimmers has arrived. Knowledge illuminates the place. Trembling. Colored. Fragile. Mixed. Unstable. Circumstantial. Shady. Cluttered. In the ray of clarity, mottled, saturated with dust, atoms dance. The Sun King sees his laurels turned to powder. Far from illuminating the universal, it flickers under the onslaught of powdery abundance. This is the age of local splendors and occultations, the age of twinkling. Perhaps now, in regards to light, we prefer chromaticism to unity, speed to clarity.”¹⁶

Is this knowledge human, or perhaps “all-too-human”? Undoubtedly, it is deeply human insofar as humans are now capable of seeing the rainbow in the light of the eternal brightness of our classical “solar” culture: the multitude of others, their diversity, the variety of relationships that go beyond mere human connections. Michel Serres’s interpretation of parasitic thinking gives a clear, explanatory description of post-human condition, acknowledging that this post-human condition is far from burying the human: it offers the possibility of renewal, of rebirth.

Now, let us be infants, again, let us have the courage.

¹⁶ Michel Serres: *Le tiers-instruit*, Paris François Buren, 1991., p.77.