what does it mean to make-up the mind (οὕτω διανοεῖσθε)?
justin murphy

Under what conditions can thought and speech participate meaningfully in systemic political transformations? In my view, two bodies of late twentieth-century thought stand out as the most advanced efforts to answer this question. Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, in their own registers and of course with very different accents, both suggest substantial but complicated roles thinking and speaking might have to play in any viable future project of emancipatory politics. Given the idealistic associations and connotations of such terms as thinking and speaking, it is no surprise that both figures have been charged with similar crimes: individualism, aestheticism, or escapism, all of which are typically implied to render their bodies of work unhelpful for projects of organized, collective political change.

In the present historical moment of the so-called age of information, we are now in a better position than ever to understand the ways in which mere thought and speech are unable to generate politically significant emancipatory dynamics. In modern global capitalism, it has never seemed more clear that what is called freedom of speech and the public exchange of ideas is perfectly consistent with the perpetuity and even intensification of oppressive institutional dynamics. Yet, I wish to suggest that in this rightful disillusionment with mere thought and speech lies an opportunity for improving our understanding of the unique conditions under which certain types of thought and speech might be keys to unlocking new forms of emancipatory politics today, in the context of what Deleuze called “con-
If it is true that Foucault and Deleuze are two of the most advanced thinkers of this question—and yet even they remain unsealed of charges relating to political triviality—then it would seem that the surest way to advance the question would be to begin at the edges of where they left off. As Foucault’s references suggest, the peculiar and conditional, but radical political power of thought and speech is a motivating concern in some of the founding discourses of Western political thought. The largest portion of this study is therefore dedicated to Plato’s *Republic*, because it is in that most strange text that I believe this question receives one of its most impressive treatments. This treatment, however, remains only partially understood. Additionally, as Foucault and Deleuze both constructed their works to some degree against the foil of psychonalysis, it will not be too surprising that psychoanalysis emerges as a natural frame for formalizing how and why thought and speech are typically pacified into consistency with political orders.

In the very beginning of the *Republic*, Polemarchus says to Socrates and Glaucon that he simply will not listen and that they “better make up [their] mind to that” (οὕτω διανοεῖσθε). What could it mean to “make up one’s mind” to the fact that one will not be heard? Drawing on the history of ancient Greek religious practices and Lacan’s topological, diagrammatic heuristics for his theory of the drive, I demonstrate how the *Republic* offers a remarkable solution to the problem of how to think and speak in contexts where political factors may doom one not to be heard. In particular, I extend Lacan’s diagrammatic heuristics to show that what is typically called knowledge is a product of a circular process in which supposedly free thought emerges from, and returns to, brute political forces. As we will see, this perverse circularity is also an explicit concern in the work of Foucault and Deleuze.

The first contribution of this study will be to show how and why mere thought and speech, even true speech, are typically doomed to political impotence. The key problem, in short, is that where power is unequally distributed, the dominant can always choose not to listen. While this may seem obvious, conventional notions about the roles of free thinking and free speaking in creating social transformation become mystified to a degree that remains underestimated. What is called free, critical, or oppositional thought and speech typically coincide with the status quo to a greater degree and on a deeper level than is widely believed. The second and main contribution will be a possible or at least partial solution to the
puzzle. The line of thought elaborated here suggests that the solution involves tactically variable deployments of *parrhesia*—truth-telling or frank speech (*franc-parler*)—which, if undertaken correctly, have the unique properties of being indecipherable to the dominant and irresistibly, non-communicatively generative of autonomous collective power. It turns out that the dominant do dig their own graves, not by creating an impoverished industrial proletariat, but because their cultivated aural numbness renders them helpless when their mechanisms of control are discovered by the subjects who learn their contributions to dialogue are falling on deaf ears. Instead, subjects become revolutionary when they learn how to “make up their mind” about this.

The tactical maneuvers Foucault discusses under the heading of “courage” are comparable to those Deleuze and Guattari discuss under the heading of nomadology, all of which are consistent with what Plato appears to mean by the notion of “making up the mind.” All of these refer to techniques through which minds are “made” by a cultivated openness to real objective forces (the only forces that can attune diverse mental processes of individualized bodies into shared movements toward liberation) but also “made up” in creative, performative alterations of social reality. Such operations are typically invoked as examples of faux-radical dandyism or individualistic, bourgeois “lifestyle politics” but the analysis shows that, on the contrary, these are empirically sophisticated models of how currently atomized bodies begin to enter into collective processes capable of transforming institutions that operate at population level.

“BUT COULD YOU PERSUADE US, IF WE WON’T LISTEN?”

In one of his later lectures published as “The Courage of Truth,” Foucault is interested in the conditions under which, in ancient Greek culture, an act of truth-telling would or would not come to be recognized as such by a speaker or listener. Foucault is clear that he is not so interested in the discursive or logical structures that make something recognizable as true, but the interpersonal and performative conditions that allow someone to function as a subject telling the truth. He notes a few key conditions:

In short, parrhesia, the act of truth, requires: first, the manifestation of a fundamental bond between the truth spoken and the thought of the person who spoke it; [second], a challenge to the bond between the two interlocutors (the person who speaks the truth and the person to whom this
truth is addressed). Hence this new feature of parrhesia: it involves some form of courage, the minimal form of which consists in the parrhesiast taking the risk of breaking and ending the relationship to the other person which was precisely what made his discourse possible. In a way, the parrhesiast always risks undermining that relationship which is the condition of possibility of his discourse.\(^5\)

While the listener can be anyone, for an act of truth-telling to take hold, the listener “must accept the game of parrhesia; they must play it themselves and recognize that they have to listen to the person who takes the risk of telling them the truth.”\(^6\) We can already see here the theoretical vulnerability of any politics based on what Foucault called the aesthetics of existence, or “the purposeful art of a freedom perceived as a power game.”\(^7\) Any politics contingent on even the attention of others, let alone a cooperative attention, could be accused of begging what is so difficult about politics in the first place, namely, how to proceed in the face of willfully non-attentive and/or non-cooperative others? It is therefore reasonable to wonder skeptically how Foucault’s subsequent elucidation of the workings of parrhesia could ever generate any useful, let alone radical or revolutionary, insights into how political situations defined by inequality and domination might ever be fundamentally altered. Furthermore, if the key conditions are not met, parrhesia can turn out very badly. Relevant to the analysis that follows this section, Foucault notes about the Republic, that Plato explicitly diagnoses “the bad democratic city, which is all motley, fragmented, and dispersed between different interests, passions, and individuals who do not agree with each other. This bad democratic city practices parrhesia: anyone can say anything.”\(^8\)

Deleuze and Guattari are explicitly concerned with this same dilemma. In A Thousand Plateaus, they will repeatedly identify a certain pattern of political conservatism, which they will often associate with psychoanalysis: “Silence people, prevent them from speaking, and above all, when they do speak, pretend they haven’t said a thing: the famous psychoanalytic neutrality.”\(^9\) Many of the conceptual personae in that book—the white wall of the signifier, the black hole of subjectivity, and the machine of faciality—are all variations on the theme of social technologies that channel, deflect, distort, or otherwise pacify potential becomings into the circuits that generate the life and consistency of the dominant social system. For Deleuze and Guattari, contemporary liberal democracy and the “paradox of the legislator-subject”\(^10\) is the apotheosis of this pattern: “... the more you obey the statements of the dominant reality, the more in command you are as subject of enunciation.
in mental reality, for in the end you are only obeying yourself! You are the one in command, in your capacity as a rational being. A new form of slavery is invented, namely, being slave to oneself. Just as we find in Foucault, at stake here is the problem that speech may be perfectly free and not only fail to have any political potency but even become the mystified lifeblood of the dominant social system one sets out to question, challenge, or transform.

Plato’s *Republic* begins with a curious staging of this problem. In the very beginning, Glaucon and Socrates are heading home to Athens. Polemarchus sees them from a distance and sends a slave to stop them. When Polemarchus catches up, he has Adeimantus, Niceratus, and others by his side. Very abruptly, Polemarchus points out that he has more men in his group, and that Glaucon and Socrates must therefore “prove stronger,” or will be forced to stay. Socrates asks if there is not a third possibility, namely, that he and Glaucon persuade the others to let them pass. Polemarchus poses the counter-question: “But could you persuade us, if we won’t listen?” to which Glaucon replies, “Certainly not.” Polemarchus closes this discussion with an extremely enigmatic statement: “Well, we won’t listen; you’d better make up your mind to that” (οὕτω διανοεῖσθε). Immediately after, Adeimantus describes the enjoyments they can expect that evening, “persuading” them to stay after they have already been told they have no choice. Οὕτω διανοεῖσθε is a peculiar phrase. Οὕτω is an adverb, which means “in this way,” and thus signifies a limitation of some kind, a restriction with an implicitly commanding or imperative dimension. However, διανοεῖσθε is constructed in the optative mood and means “to be minded,” thus implying a free choice in the use of the mind. It is a strange syntactical pairing of the proscriptive/prescriptive with the optative—it seems to suggest a sort of forced freedom.

Furthermore, as if to redouble this tension semantically, διανοεῖσθε contains νόος, mind—the mind of philosophy and understanding, of logical thought—but begins with δια, a commonly used particle to denote necessity, the necessity of something in need of doing. “In this way, you two will have to do with your mind.” The mind will have to do. Thus, Plato’s language awkwardly combines, on two different linguistic levels, the connotations of force and free thought. As a result, none of the English renderings is immediately comprehensible for us. For, what could it mean to “make up one’s mind” to the fact that one will not be heard? This does not link up clearly to any of the multiple meanings that for us are attached to the idea of “making up one’s mind.” However, this very gap is heuristic: because this current expression conserves quite clearly the contradictory construction of
διανοεῖσθε and at the same time is essentially incomprehensible in the context of the Republic, this provides the roadmap of a certain distance—a resistance, if one pleases—that would need to be traversed to bring this small piece of Plato’s thought into mutual illumination with our own. This being the present aim, a brief justification may be in order. Will the exegesis not be disproportionately extensive with respect to this passing remark in what is not yet even the substantive dialogue?

First, one must be immediately struck by the quite sudden and apparently arbitrary politicization this exchange represents. Especially because Adeimantus is Glaucon’s brother, the introduction of the question of force here seems rather contrived. One might read the inorganicism of this question’s appearance as an indication that something important must be addressed straightaway, a sacrifice of organic narrativity that must serve another function. Second, beyond this vague hint, in some sense the whole subsequent dialogue has this injunction to “make up one’s mind” as its very condition of possibility and can be read as responding to its call, because otherwise Glaucon and Socrates would have simply returned home never encountering the conditions for the production of the Republic’s ideas. My reading seeks to confirm that both the inorganicism and early placement of this seemingly unnecessary and merely rhetorical prelude are both called for by the very argument that this scenario dramatizes.

THE CIRCULARITY PROBLEM

I maintain that it is at the level of analysis—if we can take a few more steps forward—that the nodal point by which the pulsation of the unconscious is linked to sexual reality must be revealed. This nodal point is called desire, and the theoretical elaboration that I have pursued in recent years will show you through each stage of clinical experience, how desire is situated in dependence on demand—which, by being articulated in signifiers, leaves a metonymic remainder that runs under it, an element that is not indeterminate, which is a condition both, absolute and inapprehensible, an element necessarily lacking, unsatisfied, impossible, misconstrued, an element that is called desire.\(^5\)

A demand is an injunction directed to another, and as a claim or receipt on the desire of the other, the individual is located within a psychic economy that is not merely metaphorical. If desire only functions in dependence on demand, the
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economy of desire between persons is an economy of scarcity, composed of individuals who cannot say everything at once and must therefore make distributional decisions in speech, but who are also sometimes players in a zero-sum game of conflicting desires. What a subject will articulate is a choice always made with respect to the aims of a desire among other conceivable desires and is therefore always the function of a particular distribution of energy among other alternative and forsaken distributions: a political decision. But the metonymic remainder of the subject’s articulation introduces a second site of psychic politics: the inescapable condition of articulation is the dissimulation or repression of the primordial violence or cutting of language’s entrance onto the scene.

One would never get around to venturing the primordial word if one waited for justification, a reason in advance of reason. The commonplace dialectical paradox of political theory, that the state is logically and empirically founded on the criminal act of its institution—the founding act is external to the state’s laws which are only established after the fact, as attested by examples such as Romulus’s legendary murder and the founding of Rome—finds a parallel in language, or more specifically what I will call the theoretical as such. The theoretical is founded on an analogously primordial violence and repression/dissimulation. Not only does desire imply forsaken desires, but as speaking beings our articulations imply one of the politician’s greatest pastimes: the “cover-up,” in which an objectionable action that appears at the time practically necessary and desirable demands further objectionable actions to keep off the surface the original act and also sustain its desirable practical necessity. We continue to speak to cover up the unsatisfied, impossible, inapprehensible lack that motivated our first utterance.

In politics, we endure while continually revising our management of the profits and losses incurred in the primal political scene, through alterations in the status quo (small to large killings of the father, from mundane legislation to revolutions) and we enjoy their successes and atone for their failures in a way that dissimulates their reality. In the theoretical, we find the same structure. The history of the theoretical is a history of the management of a theoretical ambivalence, between the enjoyments and gains made possible only with the pre-theoretical breach of articulation and a moral consciousness we have become cognizant of only because of the original cut into the world by signification.

When Polemarchus makes his odd suggestion/injunction, he evokes this whole set of problems with remarkable efficiency. The root of διανοεῖσθε is διανοέοµαι,
which contains the well-known nous, and means, “be minded of, purpose, or intention.” To be minded of: to have something in mind, but also to have the mind forced by the object of attention into its attention. Socrates has to make up his mind about Polemarchus, consider the situation, play with it in his mind theoretically, etc., but only because the desire of Polemarchus oppresses and represses that mind. Theory is both repressed and repressing. It is repressed by the objects of its attention, the desire of the other that is its calling and whatever else its particular fascination might be, and it is repressing because, in order to function as sound reason, it must keep off the record the founding violence of its intellectually arbitrary distributive choices (why it’s not doing something else, for instance) in its logically arbitrary origination. The mind simply cannot mind itself in a pure movement of justified reason, just like a state cannot found itself in a pure movement of already legal legislation.

This is what explains Plato’s paradoxical construction, which suggests a forced “making” or doing of the free mind. Plato is pointing us toward theory’s obscene, and from its own standpoint, intolerable condition of possibility: that reason and truth are founded on a situation thoroughly mediated by an interpersonal negotiation of desire, i.e. the free-thinking mind of philosophical thought is made possible by what, according to its own canons, is a crime: a vulgar, practical necessity laced with selfish aims and opaque strategies. This helps to explain why the opening scene of the Republic takes recourse to such an opaque condensation of contradictory meanings. If the implication of this little passage remains overlooked, it is no wonder. As with theory’s founding self-deception, for this text to get off the ground it is necessary that this odd little passage be overlooked in the beginning.

Thus, we can understand this initial scenario as a metatheoretical gloss on the analogy between soul and city that is quite appropriately oblique, suspicious, and dissimulated insofar as it cannot escape the economies of repression that belong to both the theory of politics and the politics of theory. The reason this is so important is that it will help to explain one of the thorniest puzzles in the history of emancipatory politics: the perennial, seemingly constant tendency for oppositional political projects to result in oppressive outcomes strangely similar to what they oppose, as in the various examples of twentieth-century left totalitarianism. To better understand this problem as a concrete, empirical pattern—in order to ultimately understand the full sophistication of aesthetic—existential strategies—the following section explores the cultural and historical coordinates...
of this problem articulated in the Republic’s opening scene.

THE STRUCTURE OF THEORIA IN THE REPUBLIC

Andrea Wilson Nightingale has shown very well that Plato draws heavily on the civic and religious traditions of theoria in order to constitute what is, at the time the Republic is written, the new practice of philosophical theoria. Indeed, she suggests that the Republic, of all dialogues, leans on traditional social forms of theoria “especially clearly.” She observes that Socrates and Glaucon, in the opening scenario, are returning from a “theoric event,” the festival of Bendis. As she emphasizes, the establishing function of this theoric event is tightly integrated into the text, particularly in its anticipation of the metaphysical theoria developed in books V-VIII.

As a result of this debt to traditional forms of theoria, in Plato’s Republic one can plot quite rigorously what I will call a “theoric structure.” In the parallels between traditional forms of theoria and Plato’s philosophical theoria, we have the material to sketch this structure more formally. To anticipate, this theoric structure consists in three elements: 1.) the desire for a particular kind of knowledge, which leads to 2.) a confrontation with the object of that knowledge, and 3.) the problem of bringing that knowledge back in the form of a return account. The point of departure is invariably a function of forces and competing desires, and the return account is always compromised by the political reality of the desires into which it must integrate itself. The pattern is, I believe, essentially equivalent to what Deleuze and Guattari seek to capture in their well-known descriptions of “derritorializing” and “reterritorializing” dynamics.

In the case of religious theoria, the theoros often desires divine knowledge, and also operates as a function of others’ desiring. The theoros is sent by a city to consult an oracle, perform the relevant rituals, have the consultation, and return home to provide an account of what was said by the oracle. If not to an oracle, a theoros might be sent to a religious festival for the same purpose, and with the same expectations. As Nightingale notes, the latter form of religious theoria was as political as it was religious, insofar as the theroroi were most often aristocrats sent as representatives of their city. As we will see, there is another political dimension to this form of theoros in that the content of the return account would by definition be a comparative political assessment of one’s home city, favorable or unfavorable.
Even apart from an implicit political critique implied in a comparative view, messages right from the mouth of an oracle could be a significant political liability for the theoros, as in Oedipus Tyrannus. Part of the expectation for oracular missions was a scrupulous emphasis on the faithfulness of the return account, an insistence that one not “add anything,” nor “take anything away,” from the “sacred pronouncement.” However, there are several indications that this emphasis only testifies to the marked impossibility of such a pure account. Much like the dialectical paradox of the rule and its transgression, the prohibition does not testify to widespread aversion toward an unfaithful recounting so much as the problem of a tendency toward it.

First, that the whole point of visiting an oracle is to bear witness to something with one’s own eyes as opposed to just hearing an account, already indicates an inherent inadequacy, an invariable gap in the completeness of the most articulate return account. Secondly, oracular truth was never something to be recorded and transmitted, but it rather consisted in a ritualistic practice, what Elsner calls “ritual-centered visuality.” This visuality supported by practical, ceremonial supports, keeps the theoros from “interpreting images through the rules and desires of everyday life. It constructs a ritual barrier to the identification and objectifications of the screen of [social] discourse and posits a sacred possibility for vision.” In this way, too, the divine vision is from the start not susceptible to a faithful return account, insofar as the practical ritual conditions cannot be simply replicated at home in a do-it-yourself manner. Finally, although Nightingale cites the Ion for its rendering of what a return account looks like, she does not notice the irony: in the excessively “vivid detail” of the chorus’s description of the Oracle at Delphi, and also in the chorus’s comparison of the Delphic sculptures to the ones with which they are familiar from home, can we not see a note of mockery at the expectation, proffered by the likes of Theognis, of an absolute fidelity in the return account?

In the case of theoria as a search for wisdom, the theoros undertakes the work of personal cultivation to obtain a personal kind of knowledge or wisdom. The theoros would journey abroad simply for the sake of learning. Through Herodotus, Nightingale highlights Solon, who privately traveled abroad for ten years, “wandering” in the name of “intellectual cultivation.” Instances of personal self-cultivation with political sponsorship, if not correctly “returned,” held political risks. Anacharsis was sent to Greece by the king of Scythia and after studying Greek religious practices, he attempted to introduce some of the Greek religious practices
into Scythian religious culture. The king of Scythia then shot and killed him with an arrow for this attempted importation of foreign ways, and the Scythian people then disclaimed all knowledge of Anacharsis.28

The life of Socrates also followed the theoric trajectory as an instance of personal theoria, distinct from the discipline of philosophy as Plato would later conceive it. Socratic skepticism, which consists in knowing that one knows nothing, was only a negative knowledge, a limiting knowledge used for the maintenance of one’s own soul. Socrates’ practical efforts to provide an account of what he learned were limited to extreme modesty and ironic detachment, and critique of others’ claims and arguments. The benefit or gain of Socratic dialectic was only to be found in Socrates’ inner peace, and it is well known that his minor forays into practical conversion or positive intellectual production, his “corrupting the young,”29 ended in dramatic political failure.

The Myth of Er, which concludes the Republic, follows the same structure. Er participates in military battle as the practical access point to knowledge of the afterlife. Plato narrates how Er is killed in battle, travels to the afterlife, but then awakes to give an account of what he witnessed to the people of his home city. The place of the afterlife, revealingly, is described precisely as a religious festival, and there he is given an injunction to bring home to mankind everything he witnesses there.30 When he entered the afterlife, he was instructed to “listen to and look at everything in the place” because he was to be a “messenger to human beings about the things that were there.”31 However, just as in the other kinds of theoria, Plato in at least two ways highlights that “everything in the place” is certainly not reported.

The fantastic ensemble Plato describes, between the notoriously obscure “light and spindle”32 to the lives of men which are laid out—“...all the other things were there, mixed with each other and with wealth, poverty, sickness, health, and to the states intermediate to them”33—seem to represent something like absolute totality. If the experiential content of Er’s visit to the afterlife is absolute totality itself, than Er’s task of reporting “everything in the place” is like the “vivid detail” of the Ion, an insistence on a completely comprehensive description of an experience that is at the same time understood to be impossibly rich.

Secondly, one finds here another peculiar statement, which has the same functional significance of the curious narrative prelude which introduces Socrates and
Glaucon in the beginning of the text. Plato tells us that Er “said some other things about the stillborn and those who had only lived for a short time, but they’re not worth recounting.” Why, if these things are not worth recounting, is it worth it for Plato to briefly recount them and also recount that they are not worth recounting? It is worth recounting for Plato because the Republic is an example of how one can creatively signal the way in which logos imposes ineluctable distributive choices and political pressures that excise and pacify and distort; again Plato is communicating—in what Deleuze and Guattari call “hearsay,” “relays,” “noncommunicating,” or just “indirect discourse”—the theoretical and political problem that communications make sense within a status quo only to the degree they de-claw themselves in accordance with it. While no thought or speech can avoid this primordially distorting and conservative effect of communicative sense-making, one can produce “event-thoughts... problem-thoughts” speeches, texts, or behaviors that make the receiver see, hear, or feel in a non-communicating way the nature of this problem and possible ways out of it. We return to this when we return to Foucault and Deleuze.

In Book V-VII of Republic, Plato constructs, for the first time at length, the new, specific activity of “philosophy,” as something distinct from general intellectual cultivation (philosophein). Nightingale shows in great detail how the philosopher is constructed on the grounds of traditional theoria. The Allegory of the Cave, for instance, is the story of a theoric pilgrimage from shadow to light and back into shadow. The desire of whoever leaves the cave differs from mere personal cultivation in that the philosophical theoros seeks not to “wander” so as to work on the self, but to see being as it really is, to see it in its truth unadulterated by the shadows of personal desires, biases, illusions, etc., in order to bring it back into the cave. This would be the difference between wisdom and philosophical truth: the first is negative, a peeling away of excesses, biases, and illusions for the improvement of one’s soul; the second is a positive acquisition or production, gained through a mixing with an outside, intended for ultimately linking back up with others. The error of Anarchasis, or Socrates for that matter, was to make a politically inept production of their acquired wisdom.

FORMALIZING THE STRUCTURE OF THEORIA

If we wished to represent the structure of theoria graphically, we would have to show thought “ascending” from earthly obviousness to a better-lit plateau, followed by the descent back “down to earth,” to “reality.” Figure 1 presents a dia-
gram of the general trajectory of theoria as it appears in the *Republic*. The different types of theoria (oracular, diplomatic, etc.) all have the same structure, but different vocabularies, as indicated by the different labels at each part of the trajectory.

**Theoric discovery**
- Religious difference or mystery
- City-state difference
- Knowing one knows nothing
- “Marvellous” place between Heaven and Hell
- Blinding light

**Form of the discovery**
- Divine knowledge
- Political knowledge
- Personal knowledge
- The afterlife
- Really real being

**Practical conditions**
- Oracular mission
- Diplomatic mission
- Personal cultivation
- Military battle
- Philosophical mission

**Reinsertion in social order**
- “Special crisis”
- Political critique
- Socratic negativity
- Strong storytelling (alkimou)
- “Awkward” and “ridiculous”

*Figure 1. Theoric structure in Republic*

In each case there is, to begin with, a set of practical conditions or in other words a particular institution—a more or less distinct and stable desire (more: religious theoria; less: philosophical theoria, which is for Greek philosophy radically insecure) propped up by some relationship to some reserve of power or force, be it military might, state funding, or the resources of a lone individual. This desire takes off, as it were, and is propelled by these resources to an encounter with some object. What is interesting about this object, designated here as the theoric discovery, is that in each case the object is not so much a positive attainment, but some finally insurmountable resistance to the upward theoric flight: mystery, difference, skepticism, limbo, and blindness, respectively.
On return, the desire of the theoros and the journey it motivated must reintegrate itself into the practical institutional context from whence it came. As noted, the expectation of this reintegration is itself a condition of possibility for the theoric journey. But also indicated here, this reintegration is a negotiated result. It is not determined in the strong sense; there is room for play, between, for instance, a radical Socratic negativity which maintains fidelity to the truth of thought’s experience, and a more selective and discreet narrative of the experience.

Constituted by the very shape of the journey, clustered in the negative space underneath the arc of the way taken, are the positive designations for the contradictory objects which both propel the journey upward and then repel it downward. These several kinds of knowledge serve to denote the positive stamp, whether implicitly or explicitly, Plato gives to the invariably elusive object at the height of the theoric flight. After discussing a similar structure, which pertains to the psychic economy, we will gain additional resources to say more about this theoric economy.

In the psychoanalytic understanding, sexual drives must be rigorously distinguished from the animal instinct, because it is only the latter which take a particular, determinate object. As is well known, the story of sexual development, as told by the younger Freud, is the story of the infantile sexual drives (oral, anal, etc.) and their gradual organization at the genital level. Despite Freud’s early insistence on this tendency of the child’s “polymorphous perversion” to consolidate at the genital level, Freud later realized, and Lacan emphasized, that this organization always remains inherently incomplete and precarious at that. Lacan links the partiality of the drives to what he somewhat ambiguously calls an “economic factor,” implied by the pleasure principle’s relationship to the Real-Ich, what can be conceptualized as essentially the central nervous system. It must be remembered that the pleasure-principle has nothing to do with a kind of hedonistic insistence on simply seeking pleasures, but is rather the reduction of excitations as such, the maintenance of equilibrium or harmony in the psyche. It is not about pursuing excitations, but about gratifying and sating excitations so as to get rid of them because they are unpleasurable from the standpoint of the psyche.

The central nervous system, in maintaining a certain “homeostasis of the internal tensions,” achieves a minimization of excitations, a containment of energies, and is therefore the pleasure principle itself. But in the maintenance and containment of these excitations, it is what gives them the character of a “pressure,” in
other words, what accounts for them as unpleasurable. In other words, it is the maintenance of the homeostasis of the excitations, but a maintenance that, as it were, runs on the very energy of those excitations. This is why they are partial drives, drives which find no satisfaction in a final goal or destination, but which only drive out in order to drive back in.

In order to interpret this topology, consider Lacan’s following explanation of the partial drives in connection to the larger course of life itself: “Sexuality is realized only through the operation of the drives in so far as they are partial drives, partial with regard to the biological finality of sexuality... If all is confusion in the discussion of the sexual drives it is because one does not see that the drive represents no doubt, but merely represents, and partially at that, the curve of fulfillment of sexuality in the living being. Is it surprising that its final term should be death, when the presence of sex in the living being is bound up with death?”

Lacan is referring here to the beyond of the pleasure principle—what Freud referred to as the death drive. If we could imagine Lacan’s topology of the partial drives with the drive rather going straight up and reaching a goal beyond its mere point of departure we would have a topology of animal instinct, death itself for human being. Life is precisely what is sustained by the return and the repetition of the drives, and is little more than this circular circuit (the central nervous system), in the same sense that a home becomes a home only with its inhabitants’ repeated returns. In any event, Lacan bases his topology of the partial drives on Freud’s use of the three voices (active, reflexive, and passive) to describe the circuit of the drive. Freud uses the pleasure of seeing as an example. One sees (active), and from this seeing one is able to see oneself (reflexive). These two voices would appear, at first glance, to provide a sufficient description of the drive’s circuit, which is an “outwards-and-back” movement. But Freud notes a third moment in the pleasure of sight, namely, that in seeing oneself one arrives at a notion of being seen (passive).

Lacan’s interest here is that in this circular circuit, something new emerges. There is suddenly a subject, not the subject of the drive, but a subject that is other from the subject of the drive, someone to see the subject of the drive. A feature of this process is what Lacan calls the objet a. This objet a is not the object of the drive as a particular, determinate bull’s eye, rather it is the name for the hollow space that the drive creates by not attaining any final satisfaction outside itself. This is how humans are distinct from the other species insofar as the object of their drives is
Figure 2. Lacan’s topology of the partial drive

not given, it is not limited and neatly constrained by an automatic instinct; in the movement of the partial drives which constitute human being, virtually anything can be occupied by the void within the partial drive, that is, what we retroactively and only fantastically determine as missing after the drives run their course.

What is the rim? It is the *quelle*, the source, of the drive. In short, the rim-like structure of the drive’s source is implied in the notion of the drive as an excitation, a movement, a deviation from an equilibrium: as such, it must be seen as a breaking into/out of something back through which it returns. For the drive to emerge as a concentration, as a particular force rather than forceless diffusion, there must be a minimal surface against which it finds resistance. This is simply the Real, defined as obstacle or resistance, the unwelcome.45 “It is because of the
reality of the homeostatic system that sexuality comes into play only in the form of partial drives.” A drive is what presses through a gap in the Real, but the Real is necessary for the pressure that constitutes the drive.

If we seem far afield from our initial concerns, we have to elucidate what the partial drive has to do with rationality. Repression, in other words, the very constitution of the partial drives as drives (as opposed to the death drive, the explosion of the central nervous system in an enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle) is a signifier insofar as it sets up a subject (here, the Real-Ich becomes an objectified subject) for another signifier. This other signifier is, of course, the symptom, the return of the repressed, which Lacan teaches is homogenous with the repressed and connected to it in what can be conceived as a scaffolding.

Opposed to this one extreme of repression as such is not some kind of vulgar hedonistic, excessive pleasure, but simply interpretation. “Desire, in fact, is interpretation itself.” The move from one signifier to another, in other words the search for meaning, the traversal of the scaffolding which represents the very libidinal investments the returns on which are the perpetuity of life, can be understood in this sense as an illicit travel into a territory blocked-off by the Real, that is, structurally blocked off by life and the pleasure principle: every move between signifiers is unjustified from the standpoint of the pleasure principle, as it represents an excitation which upsets the equilibrium of any particular moment and the horizon of significations which constitute it. Interpretation—rather than being on one side with the Real, as in the conception of interpretation as a search for pure Truth—is opposed to the Real, an obscene and dangerous movement which moves precisely against the Real.

The topology of the partial drive illustrates that the desire of a sexed being does not attain a final satisfaction, but perpetually recreates, by virtue and within the space of an encircling, a lost object, which retroactively appears as the cause of desire. In other words, the partiality of the drives (sexuality itself) assures us is that a final interpretative satisfaction—in, say, the finality of a pure truth, the desire for which we can now understand as the death drive—is out of the question.

If we return to our visualization of theoric structure as it appears in Plato’s Republic, and we stand by the premise of the homology between the well-ordered soul and the well-ordered polis, it would appear that missing from the graphic representation is a source, a quelle, or rim-like structure. If the theoric structure
resembles a bow, the curve of fulfillment of human sexuality, much like the circuit of the partial drive, do we not learn from Lacan’s topology that such a trajectory cannot, as it were, power itself without the pressure of a Real out of which the theric departure would erupt? In other words, the mind must be made up, out of the Real, which presses on it.

Whereas attaining a final goal outside of itself would be the death drive, the will to inorganic thing-like existence, the drives of a sexed being return into themselves as return on an investment. So it is with the mind and the so-called free-thinking subject: the Real presses, builds a pressure—or, in economic terms, invests itself—into a speaking being, and the being re-presses that pressure into the production of a truth that is true only insofar as it slots itself back into previously existing signifiers, essentially producing a kind of linguistic profit or return on the initial investments.
Recall that Socrates and Glaucon are returning from a fairly significant theoric event, heading home to Athens, when Polemarchus and the others capture them. Clearly, in the light of the preceding remarks, their capture functions on the narrative level of the dialogue according quite strictly to how Socrates describes “the return” phase of all the other theoric structures he invokes. That is, returning from a theoric event, he encounters resistance on his return home, a resistance based on a Thrasymanchean advantage of the stronger. Let us emphasize also that the festival at Bendis was not a trivial affair. The Athenian polis exercised the right to permit or prohibit forms of worship and the festival to which Glaucon and Socrates refer had the political significance of being the first Thracian festival permitted in Attica.\(^{50}\)

Furthermore, recall what Socrates and Glaucon learned at the Thracian festival in Attica. As it is said briefly and in passing in the very first lines of the text, the procession of the Thracians was “no less outstanding” than the “fine one” conducted by the Athenians. It may seem a banal remark, but as Nightingale points out, Plato goes out of his way to have Socrates voice a non-Athenocentric viewpoint.\(^{51}\) Thus, what he learns from the theoric event is a comparative political knowledge that conflicts with the patriotism of those back home to whom he will have to provide an account. When Socrates, in the dialogue, encounters the political problem of “selling” the idea of justice to otherwise selfish people, he takes recourse to myth—to strong stories instead of strong knowledge.\(^{52}\)

If we conclude that Plato himself would have to adopt the strategy he attributes to Socrates literally from the first pages to the last, that is, making up his mind—with all of the reverberations of that phrase—then what does this tell us? All of the ambiguity surrounding the Forms—that they are not strictly speaking attainable, that they are modeled on mystery—can be restored a profound coherence at the point we interpret the theory of Forms according to the formula outlined here. The theory of the Forms is made up, or to be more precise, Plato made up his mind to them in order to provide a return account of the truth. Of course, a key figure in this equation is the historical Socrates. Why are the Forms so ontologically and epistemologically mysterious? Because they are a politicized theory of Socratic negativity, a contrived positivity (content) for the radical negativity of the truth (form), the pure form of the “I know that I know nothing.”

The theory of Forms is therefore Socratic negativity plus political strategy, creativity. The passage that acts as the narrative condition of possibility for the dialogue
of the *Republic* invokes a Socrates that is different from the historical Socrates precisely in that he is politically shrewd; with this most curious text, Plato offers us a creation partially communicative but partially “non-communicating,” or indirectly communicative, deploying affectively intelligible “event-thoughts” or “problem-thoughts” that function as relays or signals to those who can hear him but which are imperceptible to those who have vowed not to listen.

**CONCLUSION**

If we look to Plato’s *Republic* for political guidance in the content of the text, it might only be because we suffer from what Deleuze and Guattari call the disease of interpretosis. As they remind us, the idea that a text should be interpreted would appear to be one of the many circular tracks along which the contemporary legislator-subject of liberal democracies cannot help but constantly reproduce their own self-enslavement. If we look to Plato’s *Republic* as a creative experiment in thought, self-conscious of the political dilemma it brings to our attention in the very first pages, it becomes a remarkable lesson in how thought takes flight, not to some other world, but toward another kind of life in this world. One might be inclined to assume that the political communication strategy favored by Plato would be Socratic irony, but all the strange creative flights in the *Republic* are evidence of something very different. The entire book can be read as a performative solution to the limits of Socratic irony, what to do when Socratic irony cannot even begin because the others will not engage: “…lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations.” Is the method of Deleuze and Guattari not the method of Plato’s bizarre text, if one can learn to be affected by it in this way?

Understanding Plato’s work to be a political-communicational innovation at the limits of Socratic irony provides a convenient segue back to our original motivation. In *The Courage of Truth*, Foucault analyzes at length several cultural variations on the Socratic “care of the self.” Especially useful for concluding our discussion is Foucault’s treatment of Cynicism. Briefly, ancient Cynicism, most famously embodied by Diogenes of Sinope, consisted in applying principles of philosophical wisdom to one’s own life to a scandalous degree. In this practice, the hypocrisy of normal life is exposed and the Cynic gains eudaemonia or a happiness rooted in the living of true life, which is an *other life* (*une vie autre*), relative to what is generally considered life. One of the key tenets of ancient Cynicism

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was that one must “alter the value of the currency.” By living truly, the Cynic demonstrates that the coin in circulation (the norms and values of status quo institutions) is overvalued, and that the true coin, repressed by status quo institutions, is undervalued. What is remarkable about Cynicism for our purposes is that it was perhaps the first recorded political-philosophical “movement” that appears to be a solution to the dilemma outlined at length in this article. The Cynic must learn how their true coin is objectively superior to the false coin that obtains in the conventional status quo, through an experimental process in which the Cynic conducts “tests,” (e.g., the seemingly ridiculous stunts of Diogenes), which separate the true from the false, the really valuable from the not valuable, generate eudaemonia, and fundamentally alter social distributions of attention, perception, and behavior, all in the same immanent process. Although Foucault does not fully draw this out in his cautious lecture, Cynicism appears to be a kind of radical politics uniquely adapted to overcome the circularity problem detailed at length above. It is a political project of liberation that begins in the subject, but only by attacking precisely where status quo institutions enter the subject, such that maneuvers of self-creation are better understood as a kind of militant direct action on cultural institutions. With empirical evidence such as the effects on public culture, the testimony of Alexander, etc., Cynicism demonstrably generates autonomous, intrinsically anti-institutional political power, immanent in a process that is nothing other than becoming oneself through play with objective forces. Finally, this is not an individualistic process because it requires honest and objective interactions and comparisons with others:

...the fundamental precept is “revalue your currency”; but this revaluation can only take place through and by means of “know yourself,” which replaces the counterfeit currency of one’s own and others’ opinion of oneself, with the true currency of self-knowledge. One can handle one’s own existence, take care of oneself as something real, and have the true currency of one’s true existence in one’s hands, on condition that one knows oneself. And Julian comments that when Diogenes obeyed the Pythian Apollo, when he began to get to know himself, the coin he was took on its true value. To get to know himself, Diogenes had to be able to recognize himself, and be recognized by others, as superior to Alexander himself. This refers to the famous confrontation between Diogenes and Alexander. Alexander says: If I had not been Alexander, I would have liked to be Diogenes.
It is easy to see how the politics of Deleuze and Guattari will fit into this tradition. Conveniently, not long after his discussion of Diogenes, Foucault indicates the path through Spinoza. Foucault suggests that if the radical Cynical practice of philosophy appears to subside over time, it is because it becomes “confiscated” into religion and “invalidated” by the dominance of scientific standards for truth. But, Foucault suggests, it reappears with vengeance in Spinoza, whose “philosophical practice... implied a true life of a completely other type than that of everyday life.”

Deleuze is interested in identifying the concrete mechanisms within which this true life can learn to immanently produce itself, endogenous to the realization that many will not listen. The more one comes to see the deeply circular nature of thought, speech, and status quo political institutions—as in the dynamics of de- and re-territorialization—the question becomes how to demonstrate these traps to others without falling into them, without lapsing back onto that circular track that always seems to bring us back to the center. The way to do this is essentially the Cynical way, through tests or what Deleuze and Guattari call experiments, in a process they call “nomad science.”

Whereas royal or conventional science seeks the stable and constant laws governing the movements of linear and solid things, nomadic science is a vague science in which the affects of the scientist are no longer banished, as in royal science, but rather become part of the problem guiding the research. It would appear to involve a theoretical and empirical training of the intuitions that pertain to becomings, where “flux is reality itself,” rather than a “secondary characteristic,” excluded “in the name of royal science.” Nomad science operates in a smooth and open space, into which the scientist is distributed by affective turbulence toward a holding of space instead of being held by space like the royal scientist. If philosophy is the creation of concepts, nomad science is the political science of life itself, the creation of technologies, through an intuitive experimental method, that produce autonomous collective becomings: “...in other words, the task of occupying an open space with a vortical movement that can rise up at any point.”

How does nomad science arrive at working technologies for autonomous collective becomings? Just as a philosophy must create its own plane of immanence, nomad science must create its own plane, and draw its own circle. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that one can build a home, hum a tune, or walk in a circle as in a children’s dance; all are possible ways to begin the process. Then “one opens the circle a crack, opens it all the way, lets some one in, calls someone, or else goes out oneself, launches forth.” But how does one do this, exactly? Perhaps Deleuze
and Guattari could be more clear, but we might venture the ambulatory-scientific hypothesis that one does this however works for one and one’s other(s). This is essentially an intuitive, affective version of the scientific method, for a smooth open space. Opening and proceeding through this circle is not a kind of glorified interior navel-gazing that semi-mystically leads to some supernatural sphere, “…it is in order to join with the forces of the future, cosmic forces. One launches forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune.” By drawing a circle on a new, smooth plane, or improvising a single tune, one need only wait and see what is returned by an other to learn what to do next. If this is done in an iterative and sensitive fashion, autonomous milieus will learn how to form along sustained rhythms. Much of the work of Deleuze and Guattari is dedicated to specifying more exactly how this aggregation of liberated flows works and fails to work under different conditions. This basic process is arguably the only way to generate autonomous collective power dynamics without subordinating them to some previously established center that would invariably trace back to the status quo, as with all too many previous, revolutionary projects. The refrain increases “the speed of the exchanges and reactions in that which surrounds it, but also to assure indirect interactions between elements devoid of so-called natural affinity, and thereby to form organized masses.”

Recalling our readings of Plato and Foucault, this tune or refrain “hinges” on a “state of force on the part of the listener.” The refrain is not heard by someone interpreting the sound, as if from a distance; it is felt, affectively. “Nomads entertain tactile relations among themselves.” It operates by non-communicative functions, “the eye itself has a haptic, nonoptical function.” This helps to explain the insistence on “becoming imperceptible,” and Deleuze’s many favorable comments on silence. Intellectual, artistic, or political projects are only worthwhile insofar as they work by “blazing life lines;” ideally they may become weapons to others, but in their actual functioning they should not be heard by those not in a state to receive them affectively. And when given opportunities to speak into the circular circuits of signification emanating from the center, knowing full well that one will not be heard, typically the optimal response is silence. The life of a Diogenes is only one possible, idiosyncratic outcome of the essentially social-scientific intuition that drawing one’s own circle, opening it a crack, and improvising with whatever forces are lying around, is a concrete pathway to the transformation of macro-social coordination/control mechanisms (e.g. the price or value mechanism). The refrain, as a model for the elementary unit of revolution-
Deleuze disliked the language of truth, perhaps because he believed it always leads one back to useless discursive squabbles he knew to be red herrings, but Foucault remained interested in the concept. One way to square this difference is to see how a real fidelity to what is the case will always exceed veridiction because of political constraints inherent to communication. Correctly understood along the lines of Cynical parrhesia, living truly, doing science truly, doing philosophy truly, and true revolutionary politics may be essentially one immanent process, the process of experimentally becoming who one is, which one always discovers to be a multiplicity, and always beyond veridiction. True life is a process of escaping the circular tracks in which this life, false life, constantly reproduces itself through bodies that are only beginning to learn what they can do, what they truly are. Although we may sometimes speak of escape, it is not “escapism” because these modes of escape are demonstrable processes based on fidelity to empirical realities. At stake here is the micro-political, empirical knowledge of real or “active escapes,” which are inherently collective, the mechanisms of which can be learned and shared with anyone who wants them. Fortunately, enemies of liberation will never know how to hear those little refrains, which become milieus, which eventually become revolutionary movements. And to the degree they learn to hear them, they will no longer be enemies of liberation.

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NOTES


3. Deleuze distinguished le mécanisme de contrôle from the disciplinary institutions (e.g. the school, the hospital, etc.) famously theorized by Foucault. Mechanisms of control are flexible, numerical variations that modulate the thought and behavior of subjects. The “obvious” example he gives is the salary: a salary fluctuates as necessary to control the thought and behavior of its recipient. See Deleuze, Postscript, 4.


5. Foucault, Courage of Truth, 11.

6. Foucault, Courage of Truth, 12.


8. Foucault, Use of Pleasure, 10.


10. Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 130.

11. Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 130.


13. Plato, Republic, 327.


16. It will become relevant to recall that this whole problematic is seen just as well in the Freudian problematic of the primal horde, insofar as our psychic anxieties are traceable to an original, semi-empirical band of brothers who kill their father to share the exploits of his promiscuous sexual reign. The brothers must then endure, through to the present day, the ambivalent tension between happiness for their freedom and remorse for their crime.

17. See the Perseus Digital Library for Book 1, Section 327 (http://tinyurl.com/kavoqay).


22. The words are attributed to Theognis as cited in Nightingale, Spectacles of Truth, 44.


25. Elsner, Between Mimesis, 62.


27. Nightingale, Spectacles of Truth, 63–64.


31. Plato, Republic, 286.

32. Plato, Republic, 287.

33. Plato, Republic, 289.

34. Plato, Republic, 286.

35. Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 76.

36. Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 10, 117.


38. Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 77.


41. Plato, Republic, 191.


50. Nightingale, Spectacles of Truth, 75.

51. Nightingale, Spectacles of Truth, 75.


54. Foucault, Courage of Truth, 244.

55. Foucault, Courage of Truth, 226.


57. Foucault, Courage of Truth, 235.

58. Foucault, Courage of Truth, 236.


60. Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 311.

61. Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 311.


63. Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 349.

64. Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 493.

65. Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 494.

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67. Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 354.