

The concept of representation in the philosophies of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze

Till Grohmann. Husserl-Archives: Centre for Phenomenology and Continental Philosophy. KU Leuven

Recibido 25/06/2021

Abstract

Despite important methodological differences, French neo-structuralist thinkers, such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida, have two points in common: they offer a systematic interpretation of the philosophical concept of representation, and they elaborate a sub-representational philosophical thinking beyond the validity of self-identical terms. This paper will investigate the relationship between both of these aspects of their philosophies. The aim is to understand how, under the umbrella term of “representation”, French thinkers put into question very basic epistemic assumptions, such as identity, simplicity, unity, subjectivity, objectivity, etc. This paper seeks to understand to which extent the critique of representation leads to a fundamental investigation of the epistemological assumptions of Western thought.

Keywords: Deleuze, Foucault, Derrida, representation, structuralism.

Resumen

El concepto de representación en la filosofía de Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze

A pesar de importantes diferencias metodológicas, los pensadores neoestructuralistas franceses, como Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze y Jacques Derrida, tienen dos puntos en común: ofrecen una interpretación sistemática del concepto filosófico de representación y elaboran un pensamiento filosófico sub-representacional más allá la validez de términos auto-identicos. Este artículo investigará la relación entre ambos aspectos de sus filosofías. El objetivo es comprender cómo, bajo el término general de “representación”, los pensadores franceses cuestionan supuestos epistémicos muy básicos, como la identidad, la sencillez, la unidad, la subjetividad, la objetividad, etc. Este artículo busca comprender en qué medida la crítica de representación conduce a una investigación fundamental de los supuestos epistemológicos del pensamiento occidental.

Palabras clave: Deleuze, Foucault, Derrida, representación, estructuralismo.

eikasía
REVISTA DE FILOSOFÍA

The concept of representation in the philosophies of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze

Till Grohmann. Husserl-Archives: Centre for Phenomenology and Continental Philosophy. KU Leuven

Recibido 25/06/2021

In 20th century philosophy, the concept of “representation” (*repraesentatio*, *représentation*, *Vorstellung*) gave rise to far stretched criticisms, polemics and debates. Attacks against representation can be found in nearly all renowned philosophers from the beginning of the 20th century, regardless of their theoretical orientation (Nietzsche, Bergson, Husserl, Wittgenstein, Peirce, Heidegger). Especially during the last decades, criticisms of representation gained a growing popularity in the field of analytic philosophy and philosophy of language. Philosophers of the latter tradition mostly reject representation for leading to a hypostasis of meaning, and thus to an erroneous understanding of language (for instance Quine, Sellars, Putnam, etc.). More contemporary debates revolve mainly around the dispute between semantic and pragmatic interpretations of language (cf. Brandom 2013). The semantic approach to language is generally identified with representation, whereas the pragmatist approach, in the tradition of the late Wittgenstein, Austin and others, is said to defend an anti-representationalist position. Richard Rorty, being among the latter, has probably launched the most systematic attack on representationalism with his book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1980). Rorty understands representationalism as being founded on the assumption of two privileged representations: the idea of what is given in sensory experience, and what is cognitively grasped in meaning. Both representations – the sensory given and meaning – are supposed to be epistemically foundational. They are said to provide knowledge through their mere occurrence. Opponents to representationalism usually criticize such representations for making a direct access to the world impossible, while constraining the cognitive agent to an ‘internal’ depiction of the ‘outside’ world.

Regarding this long and diversified tradition of philosophical theories of representation, it is not surprising that also French thinkers from the 1960’s engaged in critical approaches to

representation. But instead of focusing on a debate between immanentism and externalism, semantics and pragmatics, or even considering the psychological characteristics of representation, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida concentrate on fundamental epistemic aspects that are generally left aside by other approaches. They are not interested in the alternative between a philosophical realism and idealism, but simply dismiss the question of a direct access to reality. Instead, they engage representation on a deeper epistemological level, focusing on features and characteristics that are generally taken for granted by both representationalist and non-representationalist accounts. The dominant role of identity and sameness, as well as the leading function of judgment and proposition, are two central elements of their concept of representation. In their eyes, representation refers to an epistemic stance that can only operate on self-identical terms and entities; it leads to a form of thinking that inserts these identities into the propositional scheme of judgment. Their concept of representation thus has great scope (especially that of Deleuze and Derrida). Indeed, it can be applied to the entire Aristotelian tradition in metaphysics and logics. Aristotle's insistence on primary substance as the ultimate subject of predication (Aristotle's *Categories*) goes beyond implying an ontological consolidation of the identity and self-sufficiency of the subject term. It also over-emphasizes the subject-predicate structure as the paradigmatic form for all basic truths. Hence, Aristotle establishes both, the identity of the subject term and its embeddedness into the propositional scheme of judgment. But these aspects have not only been critically reflected by French neo-structuralists.

As a matter of fact, by highlighting in representation the logical and ontological dominion of natural language, the French thinkers repeat a critical gesture similar to Frege's and the onset of modern logic. Against a "communicational model of language", based on the linear arrangement of words in a sentence, they put forth alternative approaches to language, mainly inspired by structural linguistics. They criticize the fixity and identity of terms related in a proposition and explicitly link this criticism to an investigation into the concept of representation. The special attention paid to problems of language and logic, as well as the explicit desire to interpret representation through its linguistic foundations, constitutes a remarkable parallel with approaches from contemporary analytic philosophy. However, whereas philosophers from the analytic tradition mostly reject representation altogether (except for Robert Brandom), the French thinkers try to provide representation's genetic conditions. They think representation through "sub-representational" elements, mechanisms or structures, which operate underneath the level of representational thinking.

This is how they seek to elaborate new epistemic models that exceed, transcend or eclipse representation – and which renounce the norm of identity and traditional term logic. Hence, the particularity of the French thinkers consists in using the epistemic limits of representation in order to construe sets of yet unknown philosophical objects (such as ‘différance’ and ‘différence’, ‘singularity’, ‘seriality’, ‘multiplicity’, ‘gaps’, ‘heterotopia’, etc.). The present paper seeks to provide a presentation and a discussion of the concepts of representation in the respective works of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida. It defends the idea that despite the great methodological differences between these authors, representation constitutes a shared philosophical preoccupation. In a first section, I will present the three author’s approaches separately. I will concentrate on their respective interpretations of representation, and provisionally leave aside the author’s own positive philosophical elaborations. Only after this first section will I show, in a second step, the sense in which the three authors engage in a “sub-representational” thinking, which is meant to provide the genesis of representation. This second part of the paper is noticeably shorter than the first one. It is simply meant to indicate the philosophical direction and the general speculative insights through which the French authors seek to go beyond representation.

§ 1. The interpretation of representation in Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida

1.1. Representation in the philosophy of Michel Foucault

Is representation a general style of thinking, a mental attitude that can be found in every historical era whatsoever? Or is it restricted to a particular philosophical period? Foucault clearly argues in favor for the second option. In his *Les mots et les choses* he presents a historical understanding of representation, in which representation stands for the epistemic arrangement of the “classic age”. It dominates sciences from the 17th to the end of the 18th century. For Foucault, “representation” becomes an umbrella term signifying the prevalence of various philosophical concepts, such as *idea*, *Vorstellung*, *repraesentatio*, etc. Instead of referring to a mere mental entity, it designates the epistemic framework, which grounds knowledge in the classic age. It unfolds a field of empiricity in which different sciences can place their objects (Foucault 1966, 86). Hence, representation does not simply constitute a scientific, but rather a meta-scientific concept. Its particularity consists in a systematic and spatialized approach to knowledge, obeying the paradigm of a “table”

(*tableau*), into which every knowable entity has to be inserted: in order to be knowable, things have to be inserted in the table. In the era of representation, knowledge is only possible on the background of such a totalizing system, which indicates a precise *locus* for each knowable entity.

The centre of knowledge, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, is the *table* (*le tableau*). As for the great controversies that occupied men's minds, these are accommodated quite naturally in the folds of this organization. (Foucault 2005, 82/1966, 89)

The spatialized and systematic approach to knowledge in the classic age is the crucial factor distinguishing the use of ideas/representations in the classic age from its scholastic forerunners. The scholastics identified ideas with forms, species or *eide*. These were endowed with a certain power and agency (both ontologically and epistemically). St. Thomas, for instance, asserts that:

For the Greek word *Idea* is in Latin *Forma*. Hence by ideas are understood the forms of things, existing apart from the things themselves. Now the form of anything, existing apart from the thing itself, can be for one of two ends; either to be the exemplar of that of which it is called the form, or to be the principle of the knowledge of that thing, according as the forms of knowable things are said to be in him who knows them. (Aquinas 1964, I, quaest. 15, art 1; 1945, 161-162)

In the philosophy of St. Thomas, ideas have both epistemological and ontological primacy: they serve as exemplars for God's creation and provide the knowledge of things in as much as they are received by a knowing agent. St. Thomas' account of ideas draws on the theory of intentional species that transit from the knowable things to the knowing mind, and thereby undergo a series of transformations – from sensible species to intelligible species (Aquinas 1937).

The ideas of the scholastics exist apart from the things themselves. But the way they exist apart is fundamentally different from the 17th and 18th century's independence of representation from the things represented. As a matter of fact, the ideas of the scholastics are ideas of things, and belong to them either as their principle of knowledge or existence. The ideas in the classic age, on the contrary, are primarily related to each other according to the sole laws that are immanent to knowledge itself. They stand in no mutual dependence with the objects for which they hold, but are primarily related to each other. In contrast to the object-directed approach of the species theory, the classic age conceives knowledge through a comparison between representations. It seeks to decipher the rational order according to which things are organized and classified within the entire

system of knowledge. Outside of this holistic order, no knowledge is possible. Foucault's emphasis on the "table-chart" underlines the primacy of such a rational order and its spatialization.

In Foucault's reading, the classic age is overall representationalist – but not because it assigns a special epistemic status to the knowing subject; it does not depart from the idea of a cognitive agent that re-presents the outer world within a realm of immanence. Quite the contrary is the case. The classic age is representationalist because it favors a systematic, serialized and rationally ordered approach to reality (Foucault 2005, 60). As we might expect, Foucault here draws on Descartes' *Regulae* – namely his fifth and sixth rule – in order to justify the epistemic prevalence of order (Descartes 2003). In these rules, Descartes respectively defends the methodological primacy of the order and arrangement of knowledge (rule V), as well as the organization of known things according to their degree of simplicity and complexity (rule VI). His method consists in departing from the simplest terms, to which the scientist progressively adds degrees of complexity. This activity of serialization favors sharp distinctions over approximate comparisons. It seeks to establish clear identities and their differences – and differences are here always differences *between identities*. Foucault underlines the leading epistemic role of identity in representation:

After being analysed according to a given unit and the relations of equality or inequality, the like is analysed according to its evident identity and differences: differences that can be thought in the order of inferences.“ (Foucault 2005, 60/19666, 68)

Order and seriality are both dependent on the establishment of clear identities and their sharp distinctions. Furthermore, as Foucault underlines, all the epistemic features necessary to the serialization of knowledge do “not concern the being of things but rather the manner in which they can be known.” (Foucault 2005, 60/1966, 68) In other words, the order is completely immanent to knowledge itself and does not take into account the things' extra-mental existence.

The classic age's dominant role of order in knowledge is also the reason why Foucault pays special attention to *mathesis universalis* and *taxinomia*. Both constitute the logical structure of the table and are responsible for the twofold subordination of difference under conceived identity and perceived resemblance (Foucault 1966, 66). They define representation as a twofold enterprise, which combines a calculable order of things with the quest for their empirical genesis. They unfold a field of empiricity onto which the three sciences of theory of wealth, life and language can project their objects.

To this occasion, Foucault presents a provocative interpretation of Cartesian rationalism that challenges the traditional understanding of *mathesis universalis*. According to Foucault, *mathesis* does not refer to the mere mathematization of natural phenomena within their mechanistic understanding. It is rather linked to a rational order into which nature needs to be inserted for being knowable (Foucault 1966, 70). However, due to their inherent complexity, empirical phenomena cannot be immediately ordered in the same way as the so-called ‘*simples natures*’ (Foucault 1966, 86). This is why *taxinomia* is required, understood as the science of empirical orders. *Taxinomia* has the task to reconstruct the continuous series between empirical things and to ascend to their empirical origins.

But the most important characteristic of representation in Foucault’s reading has not yet been mentioned. Foucault’s historical epistemology proves to be highly original in his paying attention to the science of linguistics in the classic age. Instead of focusing on the philosophical invention of a concept of subjectivity, or the debate between rationalism and empiricism, Foucault assigns a crucial role to the emergence of a systematic study of language under the title of *Grammaire générale*. His reading seeks to show that the historical advent of representation is the result of a fundamental subversion of the status and function of the sign at the end of the Renaissance age (Foucault 1966, 78). Whereas in the Renaissance age, the sign was intended to resemble that which it signified (Foucault 1966, 50), in the classic age, it is meant to “represent” its object within an “idea” (Foucault 1966, 78). The idea refers to a mental entity endowed with two principal features: it represents – and thus mentally reflects and reduplicates – the object of which it is an idea; and it represents itself and its own relationship to the object. Most important, according to Foucault, this mentalist definition of the idea arises not from a new psychological understanding of the knowing subject, but rather from the classic study of language in the form of *Grammaire générale*. In Foucault’s reading, *Grammaire générale* amounts to an inquiry into representation itself and the way it represents itself within the linguistic structures (Foucault 1966, 106).

Since it [scil. *Grammaire générale*] makes language visible as a representation that is the articulation of another representation, it is indisputably ‘general’; what it treats of is the interior duplication existing within representation. (Foucault 2005, 101/1966, 106)

Foucault suggests the possibility of a derivation of the psychological features of representation from a general description of the sign in the classic age: it is as if the dominant and exemplary role of the sign in the classic age provides the speculative origin

for the modern concept of subjectivity and (self-)consciousness. It seems obvious to say that a self-referential subjectivity, a subject that represents itself and its relationship to the world, necessarily refers to itself through signs – and that its self-referential ability therefore depends on its capacity to use signs, and thus, language. But Foucault goes even one step further, asserting that the advent of a philosophical theory of self-consciousness in the classic age is nothing but an epiphenomenon of a more fundamental structural revolution concerning the understanding and the structure of the sign. In fact, when Foucault says that ideas and signs are strictly “coextensive” (Foucault 1966, 79), he does not simply assert that we can find a corresponding sign to every idea. Ideas and signs are coextensive because they both conform to the general structure of representation. But since representation has itself a semiological structure, signs become the ruling element both of representation and of ideas. In other words, ideas are ‘representational’ in as much as they imitate the general structure of the sign. In the same way that the sign is always a sign of something (in a classic definition: a signifying entity referring to a signification) the idea also can be broken down into the implicit presence of two ideas. We have here an idea of the (representing) idea (i.e. of itself) and an idea of the (represented) object. Interestingly, the reduplicated definition of the idea is directly drawn from the definition of the sign in the *Logic of Port Royal* – which occupies a strategic role in Foucault’s analysis. As a matter of fact, Arnauld and Nicole assert that “when we view a certain object merely as representing another, our idea of it is an idea of a sign, and the first object is called a sign.” (Arnauld and Nicole 1996, 35) As soon as an idea represents something, it becomes a sign of the latter. Hence, every idea, *qua representation*, is a sign. Foucault only repeats the *Port Royal* definition of the sign when he says: “Whenever one representation is linked to another and represents that link within itself, there is a sign...” (Foucault 2005, 72/1966, 79) But if representation’s self-representation is the direct result of representation’s being a sign, then obviously, is self-consciousness, (i.e. the consciousness of having a certain representation) fundamentally based in, and dependent upon, *semiotics*. Foucault avoids addressing this issue directly. But his analyses nevertheless all point in the same direction. Two more analogies between language and the structure of consciousness confirm this interpretation. First, language in the classic age, just as consciousness, is understood as being both generally unnoticed and indisputably sovereign (Foucault 1966, 92): as a transparent reduplication of itself, consciousness/language both hide and conceal their own functioning; and in providing the general form for all thinking, they are the most basic epistemic feature, valid in all knowledge. Second, language in the classic age represents thinking in the same way that

thinking represents itself (Foucault 1966, 92). Hence, whenever there is consciousness, there is representation, and that is: signs.

But the prevalent role of language for representation has two other important results: the leading role of the sign in the classic age (a) subjects representation to the common rules of natural language and (b) confines it rationally to the requirements of traditional term logic:

(a) In natural language we analyze things according to a linear and sequential order. In the same sense, Foucault says that the classic age transposes ‘pure’ or ‘primary’ representation into linguistically represented representation. It inserts the contemporary and synchronic order of representation into a successive order of signs or sounds (Foucault 1966, 96). *Grammaire générale* is thus nothing else than the way in which the verbal order of natural language relates to the simultaneous mass of representations. Linguistic representation projects thinking into the realm of space and spatial juxtaposition. It pertains then to rhetoric and grammar to analyze the order and the function of these different spatial signifying loci (Foucault 1966, 98).

(b) Thanks to its linguistic mediation, representation becomes ‘discourse’: “For discourse is merely representation itself represented by verbal signs.” (Foucault 2005, 90/1966, 96) But discourse itself is nothing else than “proposition”. Foucault defines proposition as a representation that represents other representations within the realm of discourse (Foucault 1966, 114). Proposition – and thus discourse – is given as soon as an attributive relationship between two things is affirmed (Foucault 1966, 109). As an element of discourse and the most basic syncategorematic compound of logic, proposition is a hybrid entity located at the crossroad of logic and grammar. And Foucault underlines that the general form of proposition is that of classic term logic: *S est p* (Foucault 1966, 109). The propositional scheme of traditional term logic is thus the general form in which representation represents itself. All linguistically represented representation obeys the laws of traditional logic. Within the logical structure of proposition, the semantic function of the copula is to affirm the coexistence between two representations (Foucault 1966, 110) – and not between two things. The function of the copula thus confirms, once more, the general representation of language, which is to represent representations, and not things. Things are only represented indirectly, through the ideas to which the words refer. Moreover, Foucault highlights that the name (naming) constitutes the paradigmatic function of all words in the classical age: subject and predicate words are understood as designating or naming certain ideas (Foucault 1966, 102). Instead of being based on the Aristotelean

primary substance and thus a metaphysical assumption, in the era of representation the logical identity of subject terms is based on the identical representation of things. Identity is not anymore a metaphysical but a cognitive principle, an epistemic form which belongs to all things *in* representation.

1.2. Representation in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze

Deleuze treats the problem of representation in *Proust et les signes* (1996) as well as, extensively, in *Différence et répétition* (1968). Contrary to Foucault, representation in Deleuze is not restricted to a certain historical era in particular. It rather refers to a specific (trans-historic) form or style of thinking that his own philosophy tries to overcome. Representation, in Deleuze, stands for an intellectual attitude that can only operate on self-identical entities, and which is unable to approach “difference” otherwise than through the negation of fixed self-identical terms or their mutual opposition (Deleuze 1968, 91). In Deleuze’s own words, “the world of representation is characterized by its inability to conceive of difference in itself.” (Deleuze 1994, 138/1968, 180) As we will see, it refers to the logical and ontological domination of general concepts (universals) over individuals.

By adopting such a large epistemic scope Deleuze is able to locate the speculative origins of representation in the beginnings of philosophy itself in Plato and Aristotle. According to Deleuze, it is Plato who – epistemologically and ontologically – subordinates being under the headings of sameness and resemblance (Deleuze 1968, 92); and it is Aristotle who construes sameness and resemblance according to the requirements of a general concept (Deleuze 1968, 83). But it is mainly the latter step that is crucial for Deleuze. The leading role of general concepts in representation establishes a complex onto-logical hierarchy, according to which the individual (in its singularity) is reduced to the lowest determinable instance, subsumed under a series of universals (species, genus and higher genus). The whole of this hierarchical determining system makes a true thinking of difference impossible. It simply lacks the conceptual tools to grasp the singularity of a certain event. Instead, in representation, the world is understood as obeying to an arborescent structure, in which a process of division leads the scientist from the highest genus to the lowest species. Furthermore, according to the Aristotelian project, representation amounts to a discrete organization of reality, in which a higher genus is separated into two lower species that are mutually exclusive. Through different means, Deleuze here comes to a similar

conclusion as Foucault when the latter emphasizes the leading role of *mathesis universalis* and *taxonomia* in representation.

Furthermore, Deleuze agrees with Foucault on the prevalent role of language for representation. But instead of focusing on the semiological level and the representational function of the sign, Deleuze's demonstration concentrates on the semantic level. According to Deleuze, the logical structure of general concepts provides the "reason" (Deleuze 1968, 44) or the "definition" of representation (Deleuze 1968, 179). In accordance with Aristotelian logics and metaphysics, representation subjects things to four logical requirements, which are identity, analogy, opposition and resemblance (Deleuze 1968, 45). The epistemic dominance of the latter makes a representational thinking of difference impossible (cf. Somers-Hall 64): (a) The concept's identity constitutes the form of the same within recognition. It is logically related to the form of the highest genus, which unifies that over which it dominates. (b) Analogy refers either to the relation between the ultimate determinable concepts, or to the relationship between determined concepts and their objects. It furthermore sets the basis for trans-categorical identification. (c) Opposition refers to the relations between determinations within concepts, i.e. to the *differentiae*. Relating determinations of the genus to each other, it defines difference as a mutual exclusion of self-identical terms. (d) Resemblance, finally, deals with determined objects of one and the same concept: objects subsumed under the same concept resemble each other. All these "reasons" are ways in which difference is mediated and subsumed under the (representational) thinking of identity.

But representation, for Deleuze, refers not just to the blind application of such logical principles. It produces, moreover, a certain understanding of its own within the understanding of the world. This is why Deleuze returns to the Foucauldian definition of representation as that which represents itself in representing something else (Deleuze 1968, 109). However, unlike Foucault, he does not praise representation's transparency or its propensity to auto-clarification (Foucault 1966, 80). On the contrary, he interprets representation's self-understanding as being fundamentally illusory. He introduces not only the Marxian idea of an ideologically biased world-view, but also refers to the Nietzschean and Freudian themes of an illusory self-transparency of consciousness (Deleuze 1968, 19). This overall critical scope leads Deleuze to assimilate the philosophical problem of representation with the 'representation' – or rather the 'image' – that thinking forms about itself. Representation is fundamentally related to an "*image de la pensée*" (Deleuze 1968, 172), in which thinking (both natural and philosophical) produces an

ideologically distorted representation of its own powers and capacities. Within this reflective evaluation of itself, thinking institutes a certain contingent moment of its own empirical functioning as the universal norm of all thinking. The ‘representative image of thought’ is thus the result of an essentially repressive, normative and reactionary tendency in philosophy. Against this reactionary tendency, Deleuze seeks to establish a “thinking without image” (Deleuze 1968, 173).

But before coming to Deleuze’s positive elaboration of a “thinking without image” in his own philosophy, let us first consider how he describes the reactionary “image of thinking” in more details. He elaborates representation’s epistemic characteristics under the titles of what he calls “good sense” (*le bon sens*) and “common sense” (*sensus communis*) (Deleuze 1968, 175). “Good sense” and “common sense” stand for a fundamental conflation of philosophical thinking with natural preconceptions and a common sense understanding of the world. They are the expression of an overall uncritical style in philosophy. “Common sense” stands for the dominion of the principle of identification. It refers to the “norm of identity” of that what is communicated (the object) as well as of those who communicate (the egos) (Deleuze 1968, 175). “Good sense”, on the other hand, expresses the “norm of distribution from the point of view of the empirical selves and the objects qualified as this or that kind of thing (which is why it is considered to be universally distributed).” (Deleuze 1994, 134/1968, 175) In other words, it consists in a law, which makes universal communication possible. In order to be communicable, things need to be organized according to universally shared rational patterns. They have to be classified by general concepts, universals.

By further investigating the nature and characteristics of the dogmatic image of thought, Deleuze draws an interesting parallel between “common sense” and Kantian philosophy. According to Deleuze, Kant is an exemplary figure of representational thinking. This sharply contrasts with Foucault’s reading, in which Kant inaugurates the episteme of modernity and is thus not anymore part of representation in the strict sense of the classic age (Foucault 1966, 88). What Deleuze calls the “norm of identity”, and what he assigns to “common sense”, actually corresponds to Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception, which provides the conditions of the object’s identity through the unity and identity of the subject’s self-consciousness. The recognizability of the multiplicity of different representations of the same object *as belonging to the same identical object*, depends upon the corresponding representations being unified in one and the same (self-)consciousness.

Deleuze explicitly underlines this relationship of dependence between of the object's and the subject's identity:

[...] for the philosopher, the form of identity in objects relies upon a ground in the unity of a thinking subject [...]. This is the meaning of the Cogito as a beginning: it expresses the unity of the subject; [...] it provides a philosophical concept for the presupposition of a common sense; it is the common sense become philosophical. For Kant as for Descartes, it is the identity of the Self in the 'I think' which grounds the harmony of all the faculties and their agreement on the form of a supposed Same object. (Deleuze 1994, 133/1968, 174)

“Common sense” thus relates to the Kantian correlation between the transcendental unity of apperception and the general structure of the object = x (Kant 1998, A104/B404). It consolidates the hegemonic character and the absolute validity of unity and identity within both ontology and epistemology.

But how does this fit to “good sense”? Is there also a Kantian background that provides us a more concrete understanding for this second fundamental function of representation? Somers-Hall proposes an interesting interpretation of “good sense”, which makes it possible to deepen the parallel between the representational image of thought and Kantian philosophy. He understands “bon sens” as the “principled organization of differences according to the subject-predicate structure.” (Somers-Hall 2012, 38) He asserts that the “norm of distribution”, i.e. the principle that makes things universally communicable, consists in the propositional scheme of traditional term logic. Hence, based on good sense, representation is nothing but the universalization of a propositional style of thinking. In my view, Somers-Hall's interpretation is highly fruitful. It allows us to link good sense to the Kantian parallel between judgments and categories, i.e. to the parallel between the metaphysical and transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of understanding (Kant 1998, § 10). As a result, judgment, and its logical form “*S est p*”, becomes the rational norm that all representations have to satisfy if they want to represent something else. Representation, in Deleuze, requires not only that everything that is represented is an identity. It moreover necessitates that the identical terms are suitable to the general form of judgment. The represented must be able to fit in either the subject or the predicate position. Just as in Foucault, the propositional scheme of classic term logic is absolutely pivotal for representation in Deleuze's sense.

But this is not the only crucial point for Deleuze. By construing the concepts of pure understanding according to the different functions of unity within judgments, Kant extends the objectival logic of judgment into the realm of the transcendental. This point will be important for Deleuze's own alternative philosophical elaborations. It reveals representation as a complex epistemic position, which conflates the natural-empirical level of judgments with its transcendental conditions. At the core of this conflation stands the supposition of a general isomorphism between the ontological structure of the object (through the categories of substance and accidents) and the psycho-logical structure of judgment or thinking (through subject and predicate terms) (Somers-Hall 2012, 38). The formal identification of both levels restricts transcendental thinking to the level of natural and empirical experience. It conceives the condition as being formally identical with the conditioned (Deleuze 1968, 200; 1969, 149).

1.3. Representation in the philosophy of Jacques Derrida

According to Derrida, the problem of representation describes a key feature of metaphysics that runs through the entire history of western thought. It is fundamentally bound to language – more precisely, to a certain interpretation of language within the metaphysical tradition. In Derrida's reading, representation emerges through the concrete practice of language; through the expressive activity of a speaking agent. As soon as a subject operates with language, it is driven to the paradoxes of representation.

The subject cannot speak without giving to himself his representation, and that representation is not an accident. [...] Discourse represents itself, *is* its representation. Better, discourse is *the* self-representation. (Derrida 2011, 49/1967, 64)

The subject's verbal activity is overall representational: representation is the way in which a subject is conscious about its own thoughts. Just as Foucault and Deleuze, Derrida makes representation depend on discourse and language, and, more precisely, on the *semiological* structure of language. He draws special attention to the nature of the relationship between empirical signs (phonemes and graphemes (Derrida 1967a, 19)) and meanings (understood in the Husserlian sense as self-identical and ideal entities (Derrida 1967b, 4)). Most importantly, he diagnoses a general oblivion of the signifying element in the history of Western thought, which leads to the idea of language as an overall representative system. Aristotle's *De interpretatione* serves as a striking example for such a representational interpretation of language (Derrida 1967a 21), in which two levels of

representations are paralleled. On the first level of representation, spoken words are defined as symbols for impressions of the soul (*pathemata tes psyches*). The voice thus represents ideas, mental entities, noemata. In the reading of Derrida, this first representational link is an essential one: in Aristotle, Derrida says, “the essence of the *phonè* would be immediately proximate to that which within “thought” as logos relates to “meaning”, produces it, receives it, speaks it, “composes” it.” (Derrida 1997, 11/1967a, 21). In contrast to this intimate relationship between logos and voice, written signifiers (and writing in general) are considered as a mere symbolization of the voice (*De Interpretatione* I, 1). On this second representational level, written signs imitate meaning through the mediation of the voice. Written signs are thus a mere secondary representation – a representation of a representation.

All signifiers, and first and foremost the written signifier, are derivative with regard to what would wed the voice indissolubly to the mind or to the thought of the signified sense, indeed to the thing itself [...]. The written signifier is always technical and representative. (Derrida 1997, 11/1967a, 21)

In Derrida’s reading, the derivative role of writing is essential to the representationalist account of language. According to this account, the graphic dimension of the sign is nothing but a ‘supplementary’ exteriorization of an authentic and original state of thinking and meaning, which is experienced in the voice or soliloquy. There is an irreducible tension between an original presence of meaning on the one hand and a secondary signifying system on the other. This tension stems from a distinction between two processes of repetition which in turn refer to the two forms of re-presentation. But first and foremost: for Derrida, every linguistic representation is repetitive; it is based on conventionally codified signs, which are only meaningful in as much as they are able to evoke in us the *same* meaning intention that another subject would have when s/he understands the same word. Hence, in order to preserve the semantic identity of meaning, every word has to repeat the same identical meaning intention in all the different occasions of its usage (Derrida 1967b, 55). This is why Derrida asserts:

In fact, when I, actually, as we say, make use of words, whether I do this for communicative purposes or not [...], from the start I must operate (in) a structure of repetition whose element can only be representative. A sign is never an event if event means an empirical singularity that is irreplaceable and irreversible. A sign that would take place only “once” would not be a sign. (Derrida 2011, 43/1967b, 55)

Representation is not simply based on one process of repetition, but always engages two parallel strains of repetitions: ‘good’ and ‘bad’ repetition. Plato, who in this case serves as a paradigmatic example for Derrida, distinguishes in the *Phaedrus* between two forms of writings. They correspond to two ways that one can refer to truth: “the writing of truth in the soul, opposed by *Phaedrus* (278a) to bad writing (writing in the “literal” [*proper*] and ordinary sense “sensible” writing, “in space” [...]).” (Derrida 1997, 15/1967a, 26) This is a crucial point for Derrida, for whom the metaphysical tradition always favors ‘good’ repetition over ‘bad’ repetition; it distinguishes between the uncorrupted “writing of the soul” and the corrupted writing of empirical signs. ‘Bad’ repetition relies on the materiality of the signifier, which is essentially ephemeral, transient, corruptive and artificial. It depends on culture and technique. In good repetition, on the contrary, the representing and repeating element – the signifier – disappears for the benefit of the sole presence of the signified meaning. The hearing of the voice – good repetition – “is closest to the self as the absolute effacement of the signifier”. (Derrida 1997, 20/1967a, 32) ‘Good’ repetition thus refers to the re-presentation of an unchanged identity, which Derrida calls (with Husserl) an “ideality” (Derrida 1967b, 4). It is the repetition of an original productive act and a momentary returning to the presence of a non-altered origin.

But just as the difference between writing and voice engages two levels of representation, repetition itself is a twofold process; a material and imperfect repetition serves as the foundation for an ideal and perfect repetition. This is why, according to Derrida, the strict differentiation of both series of repetition is untenable: “good” repetition always draws on “bad” repetition, and thus also on denaturation and decay. Given the fact that in every representation, impure repetition repeats pure repetition, a contamination between both repetitive series is unavoidable.

Finally, just as Deleuze and Foucault, Derrida underlines the relationship between representation and proposition. The context of this relationship is Derrida’s interpretation of the Husserlian theory of a pure logical morphology of judgments (cf. for instance Husserl’s *Ideas*, 1st section, or his *Formal and transcendental logic*). Derrida here focuses on the fundamental correlation between pure apophansis and formal ontology. In the same way as Deleuze, he critically highlights the epistemic and ontological dominance of the propositional scheme of classic term logic *S est P* (Derrida 1967b, 110). Hence, representation’s fundamental ontological assumption is the objectival substance-property structure, which is itself nothing but a replication (a ‘representation’) of the propositional subject-predicate structure. In sum, for Derrida, with Foucault and Deleuze, representation

amounts to the twofold domination of self-identical meanings or entities and proposition, in which the former meanings are logically related to each other.

§ 2. Representation's "sub-representational" foundation

The above investigations are meant to show that despite the great methodological differences between Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida, the question of representation constitutes a common philosophical preoccupation. As I tried to establish, their respective accounts on representation are comparable in at least three points (a) the epistemic importance of identity within representation; (b) the prevalent role of language in all three accounts of representation; (c) the leading role of traditional term logic for representation. In a last section, I would now like to highlight another common feature, which consists in the authors' attempt to provide representation's genetic conditions through the investigation into sub-representational elements. This will make apparent in which sense the authors try to go beyond representation. And it will also show that the elaboration of their philosophical concepts is driven by a desire to abandon representationalist thinking.

In which sense can we talk about a "sub-representational" thinking in Foucault? In a very general manner, sub-representational thinking corresponds to the science of archeology, i.e. the investigation into the structure and condition of past epistemes. Contrary to traditional history of sciences, Foucault's "archeology" provides neither the conditions of unity of scientific concepts, nor of their referents. It lays bare, on the contrary, the conditions of the sciences' dispersal, of their internal heterogeneity as well as their discursive plurality (Foucault 1969, 50, 278). His demonstrations seek to show how scientific paradigms are founded on pre-conceptual schemes (Foucault 1969, 84), on a network of heteronomous discursive and non-discursive practices and a plurality of different theoretical approaches (Foucault 1969, 218). Archeology thereby uncovers an epistemic gap between that what appears as a theoretical unity for a certain science, and the science's historical conditions of appearance. The latter conditions are, according to Foucault, structurally out of reach for the science in question. Only the meta-theoretical investigation of archeology is able to unfold them, namely by questioning the sciences' "historical a priori" (Foucault 1969, 174). In archeology, sciences, genres, validated scientific concepts – all the "discursive unities" and identities (Foucault 1969, 33) that are taken for granted by traditional history of sciences – are traced back to their "archives" (Foucault 1969, 178), i.e. to the systems and sets of actually pronounced discourses. The constituted epistemic

identities are thereby projected onto pluralized networks of heterogenic statements (*énoncés*) (and “series” of those statements (Foucault 1969, 14)).

From the point of view of archeology, representation (the episteme of the classic age), constitutes precisely such a heterogenic multiplicity, which enables the emergence of different scientific approaches as coherent discursive unities. Natural history, the analyses of wealth as well as the classic study of language can only emerge on the background of representation as their meta-scientific condition of possibility. Archeology itself is a sub-representational thinking, since it reflects on the emergence conditions of representation and representative sciences.

In the thinking of Gilles Deleuze, the presence of a sub-representational thinking is much more explicit than in Foucault. The concept of a “sub-representational” thinking appears in *Différence et répétition* (Deleuze 1968, 79) and it amounts to a thinking beyond any “image of thought”. As we saw, for Deleuze representation is fundamentally related to an “*image de la pensée*” in which thinking (both natural and philosophical) produces an ideologically distorted idea of its own powers and capacities. Within this reflective evaluation of itself, thinking institutes a certain contingent moment of its own empirical functioning as the universal norm for all thinking. Deleuze’s answer to this image of thought consists in the elaboration of a concept of “difference”, which provides the conditions of emergence of representation itself as well as of other alternative forms of thinking. Inspired by non Euclidean geometries, he puts forth the idea of n-dimensional multiplicities that unfold in non-metric, topological spaces (Deleuze 1968, 210). He thereby follows a Bergsonian insight, according to which Euclidean space, understood as a homogenous medium, is essentially related to intelligence, understanding, and, thus, representation (Bergson 2003, V). Just as Euclidean space can be understood in Riemannian terms as one possible space between infinite other spaces, the Kantian understanding refers to only one possible form of thinking amongst many others. This goes beyond just showing the incorrectness of reducing thinking (in general) to representation. It furthermore suggests that representation emerges out of a ground that cannot be grasped through its own means. The origin of representation is beyond the sphere of what can be represented. It is not representable.

But there is more to the analogy between space and understanding. Just as the homogenous structure of Euclidean space is indifferent to the elements that occupy its positions, the Kantian understanding is indifferent to the representations, which its categories connect. Both structures (Euclidean space and the Kantian understanding)

therefore only allow static analyses of phenomena and are incapable of providing the actual genesis of events in their singularity (Deleuze 1968, 208).

Finally, by rejecting both the existence of a transcendental ego in the Kantian sense (Deleuze 1968, 117), as well as a pre-given homogenous metric space, Deleuze seeks to elaborate the notion of a transcendental field, which is not simply a copy of the empirical level, i.e. which is fundamentally nonobjectival and preindividual. His interpretations of Riemannian space and the differential calculus allow him to construe “sub-representational” systems, which are individually adapted to the singularity of the events, and which can account for the emergence of novelty. Whereas representations need the connecting activity of a transcendental ego, singularities, on the contrary, the entities that populate Deleuze’s non-objectival transcendental field, are always already in mutual relationships. They are fundamentally differential and determine entities through their reciprocal relations. Difference, hence, becomes a transcendental condition of identity, and identity grounded in the non-identical.

In Derrida, the criticism of representation departs from Saussure’s structural linguistics, which refuses to posit the origin of sense and meaning in the intentional activity of a thinking subject. “Language”, for Saussure, is not a “function” of a cognitive agent, but a rigorous system of differences. The identity of the sign, as well as the mental presence of the conveyed meanings, require a complex interplay of differential elements that are neither fully present to the speaking subject, nor in any sense consciously monitored. Deeply inspired by this train of thought, Derrida construes the notions of “trace” and “différance” as referring to all absent, sub-representational elements, which are nevertheless required for an identical entity to be re-presented (Derrida 1969b, 76). Through the hidden operations of “trace” and “différance”, every “re-presentation” is, according to Derrida, at the same time a “de-presentation” (Derrida 1969a, 279). The identical terms, upon which representation is fundamentally dependent, originate in a non-identity, a gap and a distance – an “*espacement*” – which finally dissolves the consistency of origin itself (Derrida 1969a, 86). Prior to an original presence, prior to any constituted identity, there is the relationship with the outside, a primordial openness towards exteriority (Derrida 1969b, 96). According to Derrida, “*trace*”, “*espacement*” and “*différance*” make the identification of repeatable elements possible and sustain the presence of mental contents. At the same time, however, they remain structurally concealed within the concrete practice of language and cannot be approached within a representational perspective. Representation thereby

becomes fundamentally paradoxical. It appears as a necessary but unavoidable misconception, a “transcendental illusion” in the Kantian sense (Derrida 1972, 45).

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was twofold. On the one hand, I tried to show that Deleuze, Foucault and Derrida provide systematic interpretations of representation, which share several common points. Comparable to contemporary approaches in the analytic tradition, their interpretations of representation depart from a philosophical understanding of language. But instead of discussing the question of how representations impede or enable a direct access to reality, the three thinkers question the implicit epistemic commitments under which representation subjects the representable. The represented is not only an identity, but this identity is part of a logical and propositional compound. Hence, representation represents an identity through judgment.

The second aim of the paper was to show that in all three thinkers the theory of representation is embedded into a larger philosophical horizon in which Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze seek to provide the genetic conditions of representation itself. The particularity of their critique of representation consists in not simply rejecting representation as an invalid epistemological paradigm and to dismiss it altogether, but to engage in a reflection on the actual conditions of the appearance of representation. They try to explain how representation emerges out of the non-representational. Their very different philosophical approaches – Foucault’s theory of “archeology”, Derrida’s concept of “différance” and Deleuze’s “différence” – all refer to a non- or sub-representational thinking, i.e. a thinking that draws on the non-identical, the different, the heterotopical, the multiple or the absent.

Literature

- Aquinas, T. (1964-1976), *Summa Theologicae*, Blackfriars.
- Aquinas, T. (1945). *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*. Trans. A. C. Pegis. New York: Random House.
- Aquin von, T. (1937). *Die Seele. Erklärungen zu den drei Büchern des Aristoteles „Über die Seele“*. Trans. A. Mager. Wien: Thomas Verlag.
- Arnauld, A., & Nicole, P. (1996). *Logic or the Art of Thinking*. Trans. J.V. Buroker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bergson, H. (2003). *L'évolution créatrice*. Paris: Puf.
- Brandom, R. (2013). Global anti-representationalism? In H. Price (Ed.), *Expressivism, Pragmatism and Representationalism* (pp. 85-11). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Deleuze, G. (1968). *Différence et répétition*. Paris: Puf. Trans. P. Patton. (1994). *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1969). *Logique du sens*. Paris: Minuit.
- Deleuze, G. (1993). *Proust et les signes*. Paris: Puf.
- Derrida, J. (1967a). *De la Grammatologie*. Paris: Minuit. Trans. G.C. Spivat. (1997). *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1967b). *La voix et le phénomène*. Paris: Puf. Trans. L. Lawlor. (2011). *Voice and Phenomenon*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1972). *Positions*. Paris: Minuit.
- Descartes, R. (2003). *Règles pour la direction de l'esprit*. Trans. J. Sirven. Paris: Vrin.
- Foucault, M. (1966). *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*. Paris: Gallimard. Trans.: (2005) *The Order of Things. An archeology of the human sciences*. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1969). *L'archéologie du savoir*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Kant, I. (1998). *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner.
- Rorty, R. (1980). *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Somers-Hall, H. (2012). *Hegel, Deleuze, and the Critique of Representation*. New York: State University of New York.