

# **Propositions on the Philosophical Nature of Poetry**

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**Abstract:** This text contributes to the production of a contemporary poetic ontology under the aegis of the encounter between the physical and the metaphysical, the sensorial and the immaterial. It is not an academic paper but an open reflection written by and as a poet who sees his poetic activity as a form of philosophical inquiry and of artistic practice at once. As such, through its investigation, this hybrid text aims at tracing an unstable theoretical lexicon at the junction between poetry and philosophy (the keywords provided are part of it). The text is divided into three sections: a brief introduction about the background and the methodology adopted; 121 propositions on poetry and philosophy (with some incursions into epistemology), intertwined in a chaotic manner; and an appendix, stemming from the previous propositions and tackling the relation between being and infinity.

**Keywords:** density, irrepresentability, spectrum, continuum, multidimensionality, subversion, non-dualism

## Introduction

During a conversation I recently had with my partner, I realised with even more clarity than before that if I had to identify a gesture uniting all the diverse, chaotic, and scattered pieces of my work as a poet, artist, and theorist, I would say that all these years I've been ultimately trying to produce (new forms of) philosophical poetry. A set of processes using the, both abstract and sensual, nature of the poetic language in order to create concepts, generate feelings, and invent knowledge. These *Propositions* – or rather 'proposals', in the sense that they propose something to be collectively thought – aim at summing up, in a very general way and from the unavoidably limited perspective of my own practice, what I think I understood over the years about poetry as a form of philosophical inquiry. Although each proposition is connected to the next one, there is no linear order in the argumentation and several key-themes come back at different places so that they can be further articulated through new remarks. The risk of perceiving these propositions as peremptory, which is inevitable given the form of this text, will hopefully disappear once it is read from the beginning to the end (appendix included).

A few more words about the approach I adopted: when I use the term 'poetry', I intend a set of language-based practices including also non-narrative forms of prose, multimedia and post-genre writing, sharing with each other a certain approach to language and knowledge that this text aims at describing. In other words, what I write in this text about poetry aims at defining the kind of poetry I am writing about, in a hopefully productive tautology, as it were. Therefore, even though I often

just say “poetry”, I do not intend any kind of poetry, but the – certainly numerous – kinds of poetry that are defined by the properties that I try to highlight in this text. On purpose, I do not quote many authors, since I would like these considerations to be as general as possible, and to be filled by the readers with their own references. Also, this text is written without any kind of scientific purpose, neither has it the structure of a scientific article. It lacks bibliographical indications and notes, but for a good reason: that I would like to invite the readers to go with the flow of thought while reading, rather than stumbling on this or that reference which would in any case remain arbitrary and partial.

Another preliminary consideration that will hopefully avoid misunderstandings: if, on the one hand, the poetry I talk about does not belong to a given era or style (the frame of reference goes from Parmenides to the contemporary period), on the other hand I am in the difficult place of sharing a vision of poetry *as a poet* before anything else. Such vision is thus clearly biased by my own practice, as I already said, but does not describe my own practice either, or at least not only. It is a vision of poetry – and of poetry as philosophical practice, or perhaps also of philosophy as poetical activity – which stems from my work as a poet in the sense that I am formulating such vision from this position, with all the contradictions and approximations that this entails. So that my practice acts as a sort of filter, or magnifying glass if you will, through which I strive to formulate general remarks about the philosophical nature and power of the poetic language. The number of the propositions is completely arbitrary and I could have gone on, but at some point I decided to stop because I had the feeling that I said enough for this time. Nevertheless, as any list of this sort, it is subject to be continued in a next occasion and it is never really finished.

## Propositions

1 Poetry exists to say a multiplicity of things that could not be said otherwise. There (among other places) resides its gnoseological power.

2 Hence, as many have claimed, form and content are inseparable in poetry (and it might be even senseless to use these words in a poetic regime).

3 When poetry and philosophy converge (which is not always the case of course), they show that there is beauty in conceptualisation and abstraction, and that poetry is animated by a noetic and gnoseological necessity.

4 Because 'things' (in the ontological, continental sense of this word) and the ways in which they are said are inseparable in poetry, poetry is not defined by metaphoricity (in contrast with the structuralist cliché).

5 A fundamental misunderstanding at the origins of the opposition between poetry and philosophy consists in believing that poetry is a matter of hiding things behind language, or at least of saying something while meaning something else, whereas it is exactly the opposite.

6 The adherence of poetry to its enunciative gesture excludes metaphoricity, and also fiction and representation, as defining paradigms of what poetry is: "poetry is a matter of perception, and not of representation" (Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe on Paul Celan in *Poetry as Experience*).

7 Once we free ourselves from the preconception that poetry is necessarily and inevitably related to fiction and representation, the Platonic traditional opposition between poetry and philosophy is overcome.

8 Poetry performs, as such, the most extreme degree of adherence between language and world. In this also resides its philosophical potential.

9 "Never words over world but words as world" (Charles Bernstein on Louis Zukofsky).

10 Poetry is not "obscure" by choice (as Mallarmé points out) as much as it is not defined by metaphoricity, although it can of course make use of metaphors, yet not more than other kinds of language; but it can be difficult to read because it deals with complexity (in the epistemological sense) even when it looks simple.

11 Epistemological complexity implies unpredictability and can only be assessed by the human brain in terms of probability. This has something to do with poetry's refusal of predefined (linguistic, political, gnoseological) codes and rules.

12 In other words, the difficulty one encounters in reading poetry is bound to the complexity of the things poetry tries to say.

13 In this attempt lays perhaps the misunderstanding of poetry as fiction, or the belief that poetry deals with parallel worlds, whereas

it tries to say things of *this* world that were still unimaginable before they were said by poetry.

14 This is why poetry can be at once very complex and very simple, polysemic and straightforward, articulated yet always synthetic.

15 There isn't any story in poetry, even when there is one. The narrative patterns in poetry are not dependent on those of fiction, except in some cases of epic poetry, which we can rather describe as a form of novel in verses before the birth of the novel, and as such exclude from the kind of poetry we are referring to here. This does not mean of course that epic poetry and novels cannot contain philosophical elements, but such elements would pose questions that differ from those that are tackled here.

16 Similarly, the myth, which is sometimes assimilated to poetry by the philosophical discourse, is not necessarily a poetological form. Its features are normally, yet not always, rather on the side of fiction (story, characters, chronotope, etc.).

17 The definition of epic poetry as 'novel in verses' does not concern Lucretius, since even though *De rerum natura* is written in epic verse, it neither features diegesis, nor characters. This definition also excludes epic poems with a diegetic framework whose concentration of meaning is nonetheless mainly focussed on other aspects. A perfect example of this category would be Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for its philosophical and epistemological density largely outweighs the narration (and as such it responds to many considerations that are proposed here).

18 There isn't any character in poetry, even when there is one. This includes the so-called 'lyrical I'. The lyrical I is neither a fictional character nor a mirror of the poet themselves. Poetry brings back the subject (and the psychologism going with this notion in a literary framework) to its textual, as much as objectual, functions.

19 "I is a word like any other" (Marjorie Perloff on Lyn Hejinian).

20 Poetry takes advantage of the fact that human language is not made by direct visual images so as to deal with the unimaginable, the unrepresentable and the unknown. This is valid even when poetry deals with ordinary things.

21 On the other hand, poetry is not a notational system either: there isn't any mediation between the poem and its execution, as there is

in musical scores or in spatial mapping. In poetry, the accomplished work of art is the poem itself.

22 At the same time, because the poetic text is always a form of experience, rather than of mere signification, poetry is supposed to engender (inner and/or outer) action in those who take it seriously.

23 Experience, action, knowledge, and emancipation are intrinsically related in poetry.

24 Differently from mathematics and logic, poetry doesn't necessarily need special signs to formulate its processes. In most cases (yet not always, as asemic writing for instance shows), it prefers to redefine ordinary language.

25 Everything, in poetry, has to do with the unknown because even the most banal object is seen by poetry with wonder and complexity. Here resides another deep connection between poetry and philosophy, since they both stem from the astonishment generated by what exists (Thales, Aristoteles).

26 By the same token, poetry also transfigures ordinary language by giving each word we use every day an otherwise unseen depth. Philosophically speaking, poetry expands knowledge by expanding our understanding of ordinary language.

27 Poetry refuses (or should refuse) the normalisation and the formalisation of any kind of language, including ordinary language.

28 Poetry subverts the codes of language, speech, and imagination, even those previously set by poetry itself.

29 Poetry *misuses* language: it is a permanent subversion of the rules of language – and thus of any kind of imposed rule or predetermined code, in a grammatical as much as political sense.

30 Poetry therefore makes us discover new possibilities not only of meaning, but also of knowledge and action. It puts language in relation to domains of human experience that do not pertain to language as we usually understand it.

31 Even the most banal linguistic segment, when activated by poetry, escapes the borders of transitive communication. As much as poetry is not about fiction and representation, it is also unrelated to communication.

32 Although it can be found useful in retrospect, poetry doesn't communicate any useful content. It rather aims at creating the conditions for an intensified experience of reality.

33 Hence, there is no space for moralism in poetry, although there is space for ethics in the gnoseological and ontological intensity of the poetic experience.

34 This intensification of experience through language is related to the opening towards the unknown that is performed by poetry and explored by philosophy.

35 The unknown in poetry and philosophy is not a double of reality, but rather a previously hidden angle of it. In this aspect could reside a 'non-dualist' conjunction between physics and metaphysics: poetry perhaps suggests that the metaphysical is the unseen angle of the physical.

36 Poetry contributes to make the metaphysical present and the physical multi-layered.

37 If, as someone said, philosophy sets in when science is not able to formulate verifiable statements of truth, poetry sets in when philosophy is not able to ground its gnoseological processes on strictly rational thinking.

38 This does not imply that there is a hierarchy between those three areas of human understanding, we need all of them. It doesn't imply either that poetry doesn't have any capacity to influence knowledge. It rather means that poetry uses logical, semantical, and linguistic processes that differ from any other kind of human thinking.

39 Poetry stems from human language, but it permanently aims at trespassing the edges of human knowledge and logic.

40 Consequently, poetry is by definition problematic and unresolved. The poetic practice is full of uncertainty, full of risk, full of unsolved issues, full of chaos (in the epistemological sense), because it's full of life.

41 *Omnia licet poetis*: everything is allowed to the poets not because poetry is allowed to make statements and cross boundaries that philosophy or science, following the paths of reality, are not allowed to cross (this would be the position of Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Valéry among others), but because it prospects modes of

knowledge and alternative logics that are the direct consequence of its unusual, and sometimes extreme, treatment of language and thought.

42 Thus “omnia”, everything, can be understood in terms of totality, that is, the continuity that poetry is able to establish between language, thought and the world in its widest manifestations, particularly when it comes to its less representable and observable parts.

43 Despite poetry’s proximity to thinking and perceiving, poetry is a powerful tool against correlationism (as intended by Quentin Meillassoux): poetry loosens the ties between thinking and being since the poetic investigation aims at *re*-placing language in the world, beyond the relativity of its point of view.

44 Poetry recognises being as independent from subjectivity. In poetry, language, thought, and subjectivity itself do not produce being, but are a consequence of it.

45 Poetry overcomes hypostatic distinctions between subjects and objects, to the point that – after the ‘objectivist’ experiences in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (American Objectivists and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, concrete poetry, French literalism, etc.) and their reactionary subject-oriented counterparts (often dubbed as ‘lyrical’) – poetry shows that today these two terms, *subject* and *object*, and their dualistic opposition, have become both philosophically and poetologically obsolete.

46 Although poetry tries to embed being in the immaterial ‘objectness’ of the text-as-thing, it never tries to isolate a part of being into a specific textual manifestation. On the contrary, it shows, through language, how everything is connected to everything else.

47 It is very difficult, when not impossible, to observe and verify things like the multiverse or geometrogenesis (the fact that time and space are contingent, that is, that they might be only one of the possible structures of reality, the one that emerged in this portion of the universe). Poetry – where logical and illogical (or beyond-logical) thinking converge into language – produces a perceptual glimpse of such conditions.

48 The phylogenesis of our brain is too recent and too connected with the needs of survival to understand infinity in a rational and

all-encompassing way. We need poetry, together with other forms of thought, to think at such scales and contribute to the future evolution of the brain.

49 In poetry, the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*, abstraction and sensation, conceptualisation and emotion, here and there, language and world, and again physics and metaphysics, are not distinct instances.

50 There isn't any material *atom* that, in spite of etymology, is not at least conceptually divisible. Thus, the essential singular entity cannot be material (Lucretius, I 589 *sq.*). Poetry shows that reality is a *spectrum* of phenomena in which immateriality and materiality are in a continuous, instead of discreet, relation.

51 This could help to tackle the Leibnizian problem of the communication among substances, not just between body and soul, but among all the different degrees of immateriality and materiality.

52 Poetry is *semi-immaterial* because it situates itself at the encounter between thought and matter, immateriality of language and materiality of the written sign, but it is not *semi-material*, because it always tends towards immateriality if compared to other forms of art. It doesn't need images or objects, it doesn't need instruments to be executed, etc.

53 Poetry is *semi-immaterial* insofar as it tries to reproduce in language the speed and the multidimensional complexity of thought.

54 On the other hand, the poetic text is like a stone, or an organism. It does not mean anything beyond its existence. Does this constitute a paradox with respect to the semi-immateriality of poetry? Perhaps not that much if we consider again what we could call *the ontological spectrum*.

55 Poetry is an art of time, because the text is read, albeit often in a non-linear way, and it is an art of space, because the text is spatially composed, albeit often in a non-linear way.

56 The poetic text is immersive even when it remains on the page. Poetry always embodies textual spacetime, at least in this universe.

57 The non-linearity of poetry is deeply connected to its proximity with epistemological complexity. If the world is complex, then poetry is complex.

58 Poetry rediscovers language as part of nature since language is part of the world at the same ontological level as all the other things, but poetry also stretches our (cognitive, emotional, political) understanding of language towards unexpected dimensions.

59 The notion of *mimesis* is therefore not appropriate to describe poetry: poetry does not attempt to imitate or represent nature, but rather to intensify our experience of it through an intensified experience of language as nature.

60 In poetry, the opposition between *nature* and *culture*, and ultimately the very meaning of these two words, is irrelevant, when not inexistent. We should rather speak of “world”, or “real”.

61 Poetry is never only made by the subject who writes it, for two reasons: because the poet can only borrow language as a set of signs that is collectively and historically evolving; and because language is ontologically resituated in the world by poetry itself, i.e. as part of the world and not as a representation of it.

62 The best situation for a poet is when they don't have to decide what to write because they can just feel how to *de-code* (not much in the sense of decipher, but rather of subverting the code) the world into language.

63 The poet is always, and only, a *passeur* (cf. Judith Balso, *Pessoa: le passeur métaphysique*).

64 Pessoa's notion of *fingidor* gives fiction a meaning that differs from what Plato intended: Pessoa's heteronyms disperse linguistic subjectivity to encounter the world.

65 The poet is a collective figure and an emanation of nature (in the complex epistemological sense suggested above).

66 It is true that poetry doesn't always have to trust language, but the *arbitraire du signe* doesn't necessarily imply that poetry is insincere, as Marcel Broodthaers put it, once we realise, through poetry itself, that language and imagination ontologically belong to nature.

67 The evolution of plants and microorganisms is much older than the evolution of the brain. As such, plants are aware of more configurations of reality and manifestations of the truth than human beings. They cannot tell us about them in our language, but we can use poetry to listen to theirs.

68 Poetry is *Dichtung*, the place where language and meaning are concentrated in their highest densities. The accuracy of this otherwise false German etymology is proven by the nature of poetry itself. *Dichtung* contains the adjective *dicht*, 'dense'. The allegedly right etymology is much more problematic: *Dichtung* would originate from the Latin *dictare*; which is also where the word "dictator" comes from.

69 The etymology of poetry as *density* allows us to see poetry as a non-authoritarian and horizontal language, as it actually is.

70 Poetry is defined by density, not by rhythmic 'scansion', metrics, rhyme, or rhetorical figures, as we were taught at school, as much as painting is not defined by its capacity to depict objects as we see them or by the pigments it uses. If it were so, they would have both long since ceased.

71 György Ligeti said that "there is no pulsation" in music, and the same goes for poetry. In mathematical terms, poetry is a *continuum*.

72 Wittgenstein's notion of "philosophy as poetry", *Dichten*, is ambiguous: it has been explained in the sense of composing concepts as characters in a story, which would take us away from poetry as intended here; but it could also mean that we need poetry in order to formulate new forms of philosophy; or simply that philosophy is not an autonomous endeavour after the end of onto-theology.

73 As Alain Badiou points out, philosophy arises via certain *conditions*. One of those is, precisely, poetry.

74 Poetry is a form of thought and an art form rather than a literary genre, for it concentrates in the text the excess of the real, that is, what it appears impossible to say via a logical sentence, a consequential discourse, or a more or less linear story (be it real or fictional).

75 In this excess resides one of the major paradoxes of poetry: it is an art form based on language, and yet it eminently and permanently deals with the nonverbal.

76 Poetry contradicts the analytical assumption according to which language and thought are identical, for it tries to give a linguistic form to the multidimensionality, the speed, the synthesis, and the non-linearity of thought and perception when they are still formulated in our heads, *before* their grammatical organisation.

77 A poem can condense in its own way both the spatial and temporal infinity of the 'substance', in Spinozian terms.

78 A pebble, a leaf, the gaze of a bird, a group of people, a faraway quasar, William Carlos Williams's plums in *This is Just to Say*.<sup>1</sup> In poetry, all this matters with the same intensity, because these are all parts of the same infinite substance.

79 Poetry's intensity is not the intensity sought by the *society of the spectacle*, but its opposite: by challenging the interfaces between language, perception and world, poetry helps us to rediscover intensity everywhere, in the calmest day, in the emptiest space. Poetry is a desk-based, sofa-based, meadow-based revolution.

80 As it has been noticed, the semantical field of the word 'art' is, like the real etymology of *Dichtung*, quite unfortunate, since it presupposes the modern view of the work of art as something artificial, separated from nature. Several theorists propose the term *poiesis* in order to describe this other possibility for the work of art to be embedded in nature and history, and to enhance its proximity with poetry.

81 *Poiesis* comes from the ancient Greek 'to make': to make with the substance of the universe. This *i* that fell from *poiesis* to *poesis* indicates that a historical difference persists between the making of art with objects and actions and the making of poetry with words and semantics. Yet these gestures are united by three fundamental elements: feelings, concepts, and the whole substance of the universe of which they are a direct manifestation.

82 To create while conceptualising, to put synthesis before analysis, doesn't mean, as believed by some, to produce a philosophical fiction. It is, on the contrary, a *poiein*, a way of making in the real, so as to

.....  
1 I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast

Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold

rediscover that thought is a part of nature, not a discourse on nature, but also not a mere analytical reorganisation of collected data.

83 There is always extension in thought, as much as there is in poetry. Even thinking is not ontologically separated from the *res extensa*, since at least a part of thinking involves a complex set of chemical and physical processes. Yet thinking and poetry, given their *semi-immaterial* character and given the fact that they do not depend on images, are privileged playgrounds to explore the abysses of the undetectable and the irrepresentable.

84 In the traditional, Platonic conception, art imitates nature. In the modern conception, art, in the wake of the traditional dualism *nature vs. culture*, is opposed to nature. In both cases, nature and art are clearly differentiated. Hence the ancient Greek term of *techne* for 'art', which is of course at the origin of the words 'technique' and 'technology', and the, already mentioned, modern etymology of 'art' as the same of the word 'artificial'. Giordano Bruno writes in one of his philosophical poems: "Art, while operating, activates and thinks of itself in a discursive way. Nature operates in an intensive rather than discursive way. Art handles foreign matter, nature handles its own matter; art is applied to matter, nature is inherent to matter, as it is actually matter itself." (*De immenso*, 8.10). This is, wonderfully put, the pre-modern and modern conception of art as opposed to nature. But in a 'substance-oriented' paradigm art operates in an intensive way, in the sense of the contemplative, vulnerable *intensity* that I connected with the *density* of the poetic gesture; and art is matter itself and handles its own matter, because it belongs to the substance and it arranges things at the same level of non-human, natural instances such as plants, animals, celestial bodies, void. Artists, then, are *passeurs* also insofar as they arrange things. In other words: art *is* nature, since it is a manifestation of it, including of course its scariest, most violent, and most contradictory parts.

85 Art is one of the main ways in which humankind embodies nature through a highly complex set of cultural practices.

86 To be empathic means to feel the other not as another, but as the whole, as everything, and thus to feel myself and all the rest as exactly the same substance, the same object, the same ecosystem, the same universe, concerned by the same movements, the same history, the same problems, the same possibilities. Both in empathy and in poetry, everything is *here*, there is no *there*. Empathy and poetry are therefore deeply connected, and in turn their connection connects ontology, ethics, and politics.

87 Poetry always occurs beyond our own (author or reader) individual experience or feelings for this infinity and this totality, as much as language does not belong to anyone since it is a collective asset that poetry uses to condense an experience which is, necessarily, the experience of everybody and the experience of everything.

88 Hence, in poetry, any known object is in permanent relation to the unknown, to the whole 'substance' of the universe, towards other instances that we cannot even imagine.

89 *Poetry is a translation of everything*, as it brings into each text or even portion of text the recognition of this totality.

90 This is also why in poetry we are out of the realm of representation, because within its horizontal, infinitely signifying, non-normative, and non-authoritarian linguistic processes we can say and think what is not representable, either cognitively, or politically, or both.

91 From this perspective and in such a connection with the unrepresentable, one might say that poetry is, and will always be, searching for truth.

92 Those who refuse the word 'truth' in connection with poetry are afraid of all the colours of the *ontological spectrum* that exceed visible light.

93 On the other hand, even if everything, even if a potentially infinite unfolding of meaning and things is contained in the poetic expression, poetry teaches the poet how to choose and distinguish among things.

94 Poetry needs choices and therefore needs those who write it to learn what a choice is. This can sometimes be very painful, other times liberating.

95 Poetry is always questioning the mystery of language as such. Even when it doesn't overtly speak about language, poetry, in any language, always asks: why are words the way they are? Why is written and spoken language shaped as it is? Where does language come from, and how can we put it back in the world?

96 Because of all this, any form of contemporary poetry worthy of the name should avoid the easy ways of sentimental lyricism

and reactionary modernism, but also of epigonistic avant-garde postures and outdated formalisms.

97 Contemporary poetry does not need to decide between conceptuality and emotionality, abstraction and sensuality. On the contrary, its task in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (and after the 20<sup>th</sup>) is to join these dimensions in new, original ways.

98 I have claimed in the past that poetry as we intend it today and is also intended in these lines is a relatively recent art form, starting with the subversion of formal structures at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the practice and theory of free verse, Novalis's and then Baudelaire's poetry in prose, Leopardi's non-metaphoric language, and a little later Emily Dickinson, Stéphane Mallarmé, and what both Julia Kristeva and Francis Ponge have dubbed "revolution of the poetic language", referring to how rhetoric is reshaped by poetry in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). On the other hand, I believe that these considerations on poetry, especially in their philosophical implications, can also apply to many previous examples of poetic practice. I already quoted Lucretius and Giordano Bruno, but the first and foremost example is certainly Parmenides, at least in the Western tradition.

99 Parmenides, Lucretius and Bruno have one thing in common: they need poetry philosophically to explore the unknown in its widest manifestations, they need to formulate their exploration *poetically* for it to continue. This is, still today, one of the essential tasks of the poetic practice, although many among us are afraid of it and try to avoid it by pursuing more contingent literary or artistic goals, with the excuse of refusing pretentiousness. Such a task can indeed be quite scary, although the unknown ultimately scares only those who need control.

100 Another major poet-philosopher of the ancient times, Empedocles, formulated what I called the poetic *continuum* between thought and language, immateriality and materiality, abstraction and sensuality, in the following terms: "blood flowing to the heart is properly thought".

101 The problem of 'being' is at the foundation of both the poetic and the philosophical investigations. This starts indeed with Parmenides. On the other hand, also for Parmenides, just like Empedocles, the poetic and philosophical investigation on ontology is not separated from the investigation on the physical manifestations of nature. Again, this convergence of physics

and metaphysics, senses and concepts, animates the encounter between poetry and philosophy, and should be reactivated today with a renewed attention.

102 This vision, in which ultimately feeling and thinking, body and mind (or soul) are not distinct instances either, does not endorse contemporary mechanist or neo-positivist visions such as those of computational cognitivism, whose limits are merely their own self-imposed limits, but rather shows the connections poetry is able to engender when it's taken seriously by philosophy.

103 The mystery of the *continuum* (also physically intended, thus beyond quantum mechanics) cannot be exhausted by scientific discoveries because those are still – necessarily and usefully – embedded into predefined ontological schemes. Poetry can help us to change our ontological disposition and as such inform knowledge from a different point of view.

104 Poetry, therefore, is an antidote against the philosophical ingenuousness of some epistemological assumptions.

105 Two relevant concepts in this framework are those of 'infinity' and 'life'. For some scientists, an infinite universe implies the logical consequence that every person or moment should repeat itself an infinity of times in different locations. This is a typical example of application of a concept within an inappropriate ontological, and logical, regime. The infinite emerging in (philosophical) poetry, ever since Lucretius, is of a different order, it doesn't end in the boundaries of human codified understanding.

106 By the same token, the concept of 'life' is too often automatically assimilated to biological forms and processes we already know (in spite of, for example, quantum mechanical findings that were able to trace a continuum between the inorganic level of the quanta and the emergence of organic molecular life).

107 Poetry is essential for ontology not because, as Martin Heidegger famously put it, "language is the house of being", but because it permanently tries to expand, through its treatment of language, our understanding of being.

108 In poetry, the notions of 'being', 'substance', 'world', 'language', 'nature', 'reality' are ultimately interchangeable, given the *continuum* that poetry embodies and realises.

109 If we want to investigate being, we need to explore even its most enigmatic and invisible manifestations. We need to push thought and language where we've been told – or are afraid – to stop, not to justify the arbitrariness of religion, but to pursue knowledge. There is no *hubris* in poetry, precisely because its language is horizontal and inclusive.

110 Metaphysics, today, concerns poetry and gnoseology more than theology.

111 “Poetry, for me, is still global, total, and as such it could be said metaphysical, since it always bumps against the limits” (Andrea Zanzotto).

112 Also in this extent poetry is a paradox and somehow a failure that is as inevitable as indispensable, since it tries linguistically to formulate what escapes verbalisation and representation.

113 Another paradox that is intrinsic to poetry is what we could call at this point *the paradox of double inintepretability*: on the one hand, poetry is not interpretable because the poetic text is self-evident, it just says what it says, as many poets have claimed (hence also the frequent refusal of metaphoricity to describe poetic strategies); on the other hand, as *translation of everything* the poetic text is a surface in which a potentially infinite unfolding of meaning takes place, so much that no hermeneutic process can satisfactorily unveil all its multidimensional ramifications.

114 Poetry's language is intensive and multidimensional, verbal and yet extra-verbal, neither subjective nor objective, contingent, timeless, corporeal, incorporeal, to be read in silence, to be vocalised.

115 There, on the borders of language and what exceeds it, inside words that are incorporated into something that is not properly a language, a provisional ontology can perhaps arise from the *continuum* between language, being, and nature. Is this what the poet-philosopher Parmenides also meant in *Peri Physeos* with his key-concept of the 'One'?

116 Of course, the fact that Parmenides's (as Empedocles's and many others') philosophy is written in verses confirms, but doesn't entirely explain, his choice to write philosophy as poetry. Again, there is much more than metrics and versification in poetry. Its *density*, its power to condensate the whole in the linguistic

expression, is what makes poetry a powerful tool of philosophical inquiry, ever since the beginnings.

117 Poetry helps to think outside of our modes of perception which, despite the instruments used to expand and augment them, still only see part of the spectrum of things – literally, if we think again of the electromagnetic spectrum.

118 As such, poetry constitutes a junction between the physical and the metaphysical also insofar as it produces, through language, a sensorial approach to what would otherwise exceed perception and experimental knowledge.

119 Thus, poetry helps us to expand our experience beyond three intertwined obstacles: the *cognitive* obstacle, caused by the limitations of our senses and logical processes; the *emotional* obstacle, caused by the reduction of the intensity of our capacity to feel; the *political* obstacle, caused by the limitations of knowledge and the manipulations of information that are artificially produced by power.

120 Poetry is always *another* language that follows the movements of thought, a multidimensional syntax that can replace codes, almost like a notational system that eludes its own rules and can only be performed inside and within thought and feeling.

121 Poetry makes vibrate, resonate together, thought and feeling, or rather thought as feeling and feeling as thought, until they become signs that (re)produce and (re)generate thoughts and feelings, in a seamless cycle.

## Appendix: a brief stream of consciousness on being and infinity

One of the key aspects I tried to highlight in the previous lines is that we need poetry in order to deal with the ontologically irrepresentable. In Giordano Bruno (and in some way in Lucretius), this aspect is a consequence of the infinity of the universe. As Bruno puts it in his philosophical poem *De immenso*, the *infinite* gives itself to the human intellect as *indefinite*. We could say today that this is due to the current evolution of the human brain and perhaps the relationship between infinite and indefinite will change over time. Still, it remains a major ontological problem. Also because of our limited comprehension of infinity, it is difficult to decide whether the totality of being is finite or infinite. In Bruno and, in a much more philosophically formalised way, in Spinoza and Leibniz, the relation between being and (also temporal) infinity is a logical consequence of their respective – and indeed very different – ontologies. As a poet who, so to speak, works philosophically, this has increasingly been a guiding conception for me, especially ever since I realised that infinity is already present in the way in which poetry deals with meaning. Even the most literal poetic object contains in itself a potentially infinite unfolding of meaning, exceeding not only the author's intentions, but also this or that line of interpretation. Poetry literally contains ontological infinity in its treatment of language and signification. It is what I called semantic *multidimensionality*: meaning in the poetic language is like multidimensional space in geometry. In order to represent multidimensionality in a drawing one has to flatten and repeat some surfaces in the same space. The same goes for poetry: the text is the phenomenal surface beneath which a much wider unfolding of meaning (and experience through language) is deployed. The multidimensionality of meaning in poetry is potentially endless: depending on the text, it is possible to dive deeper into increasingly encompassing sets of relations. This is also why I am claiming that poetry is a *translation of everything*. As many have argued, it is also very difficult not to imagine that the totality of being is not endless, since if it were finite there would always be something outside of it, and therefore it wouldn't be a totality. The logical unicity of this totality (in Spinoza's argumentation, if the substance is all-encompassing, there cannot be another substance that is not comprehended in this substance) depends on the other hand on what we intend by 'unicity'. In this totality there is also necessarily an infinite plurality. But we also have to decide what is meant by 'infinity' in an ontological scenario, besides its different mathematical orders as shown by Cantor. From a temporal point of view, we could say that eternity, the infinity of time, could either be a temporal flow without beginning nor end, or the absence of time itself. Since, according to modern physics, time and space are the same entity, the same distinction could be applied to space, albeit in a less intuitive way. I find the notion of *geometrogenesis*

fascinating in this sense, as it allows us to understand infinity not only as something that has no end in time and space (temporal or geographical endlessness), but also something that, in certain physical conditions that are different from the ones we observe in this (portion of the) universe, is out of time and has no place. This, incidentally, can be connected to the very important – and in this case at least partially observable – notions of ‘non-locality’ and ‘quantum consciousness’, which seem equally appropriate for poetry and for the universe’s behaviours, as poetry also spreads beyond predefined spatiotemporal, geographical, psychological, individual, grammatical, semantical, and figural coordinates. Is the infinity of being somehow independent from the contingent configuration of time and space in this specific portion of the universe? Could being pre-exist to spacetime? And how could such a conception be connected to language? Are these models of infinity embedded into the semantical infinity of the poetic text? These seem to me major poetological questions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They might appear somewhat abstract, but they also have, I firmly believe, strong political implications. The opening of meaning towards infinity, and therefore of the possibilities of meaning, is, in my opinion, an essential step towards the creation of new political models, as much as it constitutes a gnoseological expansion towards a wider understanding of being which is not less real just because it hasn’t been figured out (in the literal sense) so far. In all the local and miserable sorrows, abuses, hierarchies, and conflicts that we observe at the human scale, there is a desperate need to look inside the sky for something present and yet irrepresentable. The irrepresentable in this sense has a deep connection with what Judith Balso calls the impossible in her political theory: we have no choice but to rely on the inexistent and the impossible (“*compter sur l’impossible inexistant*”, as she writes) to formulate new political scenarios, just like we have no choice but to rely on the unrepresentable within the realm of poetry. I have been claiming over the years, and striving towards this in my own practice, that poetry overcomes obstacles: cognitive, political, and emotional obstacles put by power, or by ourselves, inside language, imagination, and feeling, that can be subverted by the freedom, the variety, and the multidimensionality of the poetic approach to reality. I have also mentioned above the horizontality and the refusal of authority that are typical of the *Dichtung*, as well as its intrinsic subversive features. The different levels of – also semantical – infinity are, *together with* the question of being, at the core of the interaction between poetry and philosophy. This, in turn, is deeply connected to the creation of possibility from the impossible, within and without language. I would thus like to go back to the first text of the Western tradition in which poetry and philosophy operate together to question the nature of everything: Parmenides’s philosophical poem, often titled (not by himself) *Peri Physeos – On Nature*. Like many poets and philosophers, I am deeply fascinated by the fragments of

this text, and by the fact that Parmenides was the first to understand that poetry is indispensable to question being. The main reason why I am thinking of Parmenides again here is that I am troubled by the traditional interpretation of his notion of *being* as *finite*, in opposition to his disciple Melissos's. As it is widely known, Parmenides compares being to a sphere. I think that a too strict geometrical interpretation of this comparison led traditional scholarship potentially out of track.<sup>2</sup> First, let us recall that, from Nicholas of Kues and Neoplatonism onwards, the paradoxical possibility of an infinite sphere has been widely envisaged in order to represent the universe, the substance, and God, particularly when those instances exceed our imaginative coordinates. This image comes back in a famous fragment by Pascal ("une sphère infinie dont le centre est partout et la circonférence nulle part"). This notion of infinite sphere seems to me very close to the paradoxical nature of poetry as nonverbal language, immaterial materiality, and translation of everything I tried to express above. I think that Thomas Traherne's poetry confirms this connection:

'Twas not a sphere,  
Yet did appear,  
One infinite. 'Twas somewhat everywhere,  
And tho' it had a power to see  
Far more, yet still it shin'd  
And was a mind  
Exerted for it saw Infinity.  
(*My Spirit*, VI)

Incidentally, in this "everywhere" we could spot an *ante-litteram* understanding of quantum non-locality. Poetry often precedes other forms of understanding. *Omnia licet poetis*: although I am not a Parmenides scholar, as a poet I dare to find not only in Traherne's, but in Parmenides's lines themselves the reason to question the finitude of being in his philosophy. Some terms Parmenides uses to qualify being – *οὐκ ἀτελεύτητον, οὐκ ἐπιδεδῆς, τετελεσμένον* – indicate that it is rather *not incomplete*, which is different from *finite*. Being can be complete as totality and yet be infinite in a sense that, precisely, exceeds our contingent, mathematical understanding of endlessness. This state of completeness of being implies, writes Parmenides, that it is *ἄπαστον* and *ἄναρχον*, without an end and without beginning, which seems to me much closer to an idea of temporal infinity as described above than to a conception of being as finite. I cannot help to notice that being as *ἄναρχον* allows us to trace yet another connection between the openness towards infinity

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<sup>2</sup> Like other scholars, I have also doubts on Parmenides's correlationism, but I will leave this to another time.

and political subversion as refusal of hierarchical governance, since the very beginning of both philosophy and poetry. Being is also, according to Parmenides, *συνεχῆς* (continuous), another feature that I myself used in order to show the contribution that poetry can bring to non-dualistic metaphysical models (what I called *continuum* and *ontological spectrum*), which, especially since Spinoza, are connected with a conception of being, or substance, as infinite. Above all, the possibility to reconsider the infinity of being in Parmenides's poem could solve a philological puzzle: according to one of the most accredited readings, the one by the Byzantine philosopher Simplicius, being is *ἡδ'ἀτέλειστον*, "without an end". Scholars like Barbara Cassin proposed to replace this reading with *οὐδ'ἀτέλειστον*, "not endless"; others, like Leonardo Tarán, with *ἡδὲ τέλειστον*, "and complete". Could it be that those replacements are not necessary? Could it be instead that, ever since their common beginnings, poetry and philosophy have investigated being and infinity together, reminding us that no limit should stand between us, the understanding of this world, and the way in which we can act within it? Or that, if not Parmenides himself, at least Simplicius's reading opens this possibility? Whatever the right interpretation, the possibility of a deep convergence between being and infinity, between what is *here* and what cannot even be imagined, traces back to the dawn of thought the non-dualistic convergence of ethics and ontology, primarily embodied by poetry.