Tension / Spannung

Edited by Christoph F. E. Holzhey

Cultural Inquiry

VERLAG TURIA + KANT

BRUNO BESANA

Tension on Tension

Some Considerations that Might Help to Produce an Increasingly Precise Understanding of a Problem which Has No Specific Object

ABSTRACT: This article shows that 'tension' cannot be conceived as a specific *object* of an analysis for which one could determine a precise field of enquiry. Instead, it establishes tension as a specific *mode* or angle of approach with which any given contingent object or set of objects can be explored. The wideness of its applicability and the specificity of its angle suggest that research on tension can help to unfold a better understanding of a classical ontological question concerning the *essential* value of actions and relations in the definition of what a thing is. The text follows this line of argumentation by pairing contemporary philosophical sources and specific aesthetic and political examples. Suggesting the possibility of an open classification of different modes of tension, it clarifies the extent to which the essential definition of a thing is bound to the contingent analysis of its transformations.

KEYWORDS: cinema; duration; harmony; interruption; Klee, Paul; suspense; tension

TENSION ON TENSION

Some Considerations that Might Help to Produce an Increasingly Precise Understanding of a Problem which Has No Specific Object

Bruno Besana

INTRODUCTION

The following text starts from a predicament: if one takes 'tension' as an object of enquiry, the field of potentially fitting terms seems to be indefinitely expansible. It seems, in other words, possible to analyse everything in terms of tension, and this leaves the enquirer with the vexing sensation that the consistency of her object of analysis is somehow diluted. Yet on the other hand, every time one tries to impose a strict limitation or definition to the field of research on tension, the opposite sensation arises, namely the sensation that an artificial restriction has been imposed to the enquiry, therefore excluding some crucial elements from the analysis.

How then to escape such a double bind, such an alternative between what one can call the 'homeopathic deviation' and the 'watchdog deviation'? The point from which one can start is the following: if tension is indeed an idea that tends to expand itself indefinitely, it is because it is *not* precisely an *object* of analysis. Put differently, there is no such thing as a specific set of properties according to which one can say if a given object 'x' is or is not a 'tension', as one would say that a certain object is or is not a fruit, a concept, an adjective or an animal. Starting from this predicament, I propose to consider tension *not as an object*, but as a specific *mode* of seizure for *any* object. It is a *mode* of analysis of objects. This shift of angle entails a shift of question: in fact, the question of the present enquiry cannot be 'what is tension' but rather 'what does one perceive of a given object when one analyses it in terms of tension'. Via a set of quite heterogeneous examples, we will see, in the following pages, what happens, and which consequences are produced, when something is defined and analysed not as an object, but as a point or moment of tension. I will in particular insist on how such

an approach – which renounces defining an object in favour of defining a relation[1] – produces a non-finite analysis, in which a new term is constantly found: a term that can in turn be analysed as a tensive relation. More specifically, I have selected a set of examples (the heterogeneity of which intends to stress that the analysis is not bound to a specific category of objects) through which one can see how the analysis of a specific mode of tension produces the identification of a further one. I therefore try simply to unfold how the analysis of abstract modalities of tension is, quite literally, a productive one: each analytic moment produces the identification of further angles of analysis. It should be noted that the relations between the different modes and models of tension that are thus found are always contingent, i.e. the analysis does not aim at producing a transcendental schematism, a fixed architecture that would contain all the possible relations between these modes and models.

To lead an analysis in terms of tension means, from a philosophical perspective, to analyse at once some objects and their transformation, thereby excluding that one produces a definition of 'what a thing is' without taking its own modes of transformation into account. In other terms, an object is analysed not as a substance that endures *accidental* transformations, but as the result of a set of *essential* relations and transformations. This attitude has of course a long tradition in philosophy, a tradition that can be traced back to the theory of categories of the Greek Stoics (for whom the most precise categorical mode of analysis of a given object is the analysis of its accidental transformations) and extends up to the Marxist idea of the centrality of praxis in the definition of material reality. As a syncretic example of both the Greek and the post-Hegelian tradition, one can read a passage from an early Alain Badiou text, in which he claims:

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1 Of course 'tension' and 'relation' are not synonyms and the question remains of knowing which type of relation we are talking about when we speak about tension, and between what and what this relation takes place. To this extent we will provide along with the text some possible criteria to define a relation as 'tensive'. But first and foremost we will try to show that, when thinking in terms of tension, there is not only a shift of focus from objects to relations, but relations appear to be the fundament on which objects are thought. The question of the 'between what and what' of a relation is thus somehow turned upside down.

> The internal nature of things, their essence, is nothing other than the law of their transformation. This principle is set in what one can call the Heraclitean heritage of dialectics: everything changes […]. The essence of this principle (the principle of reality as process) consists in the affirmation that a given state of reality is by definition transitory, i.e. that the law of things is neither balance, nor structure, but the rupture of all balance, and, by consequence, the necessary development of the destruction of the current state of things. […] Properly speaking, the real does not come under the category of the object. The object is in fact that which is given to knowledge as a state or as figure. But the content of each state and each figure is the uninterrupted process of its own metamorphosis.[2]

The conceptual analysis of an object in terms of forces which, standing in a tensive relation with each other, produce its formation and transformation seems to have a possible double advantage: on an ontological level, it allows considering the production of transformations, divisions, and creation of new objects not as an accidental set of facts that objects endure, but as an objective element of their definition; on a gnoseological level, it configures a productive mode of analysis in which a new objective mode of tension is always found in the analysis of the relation between different types of tensions.

In order to frame the examples of the following pages, it is possible to identify a series of minimal common characteristics that different analyses of objects, led from the perspective of tensive relations, seem to have in common.

First, as one analyses an object in terms of tension, the object appears under a relational angle. Each term is therefore *essentially* analysed in its relation to other objects. There is thus no such thing as the possibility of analyzing the essence of something 'as such', or as opposed to the accidentality of its relations.

Second, the analysis of an object in terms of tensions is not an essentialist account of what 'a thing is', but a diachronic account of

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2 Alain Badiou, *Théorie de la contradiction* (Paris: Maspero, 1975), p. 51; (partial) translation by Alberto Toscano available on different sites, e.g., <http://versuslaboratory.janvaneyck.nl/seminars/view/2> [accessed 1 June 2010]. Badiou also adds, in this sense, that the object is the opposite of the process, in the same way that metaphysics is the opposite of dialectics: 'metaphysics – which is precisely the theory of identity – is driven by a powerful conservative tendency. It is an enterprise which guards the given state of reality'. This would be, somehow, what we call here the 'watchdog deviation'.

how a thing 'works':[3] it describes in fact at once the internal tensions upon which the given thing is constituted, and the relational tensions upon which it is located in a space and a time. To ask what an object 'is' becomes the equivalent of asking how it transforms itself, under which conditions, from what to what, producing which divisions, which destructions, which novelties.

Third, an object being constituted by means of a set of multiple (internal and relational) tensions, one also needs to take into account the *relation between* such tensions. More precisely, the analysis of the relation between different tensions animating an object (as opposed to the analysis of a relation between specific objects) leads to the identification of the mode of producing a new term, a new tension. The analysis of tensions is never simply analytical, but is synthetically productive, in the sense that it leads to the unfolding, to the discovery of a new term, of a new type of tension. The account of a system of different types of tensions is therefore characterized by the fact of being an expanding field.

Fourth, in such an expanding analysis, in which the relation between different modes of tension produces the visibility of further relations, it is nonetheless possible to proceed in a consistent way, finding a system of inclusion of new terms – what one might call an 'open encyclopaedia of the modes of tension': in the analysis of different examples, it progressively appears how – because of their relation nature – recurrent modes of tension cannot be analysed alone, but always – at least – in couples. Furthermore, it is exactly in the combined analysis of different modes of tension that a further one becomes visible. In order to give consistency to the analysis of tension, an important criteria can thus be to select those relations between types of tension that allow with particular evidence the identification of a further type. Therefore the examples in this article have been selected exactly for their capacity to show how the analysis of the relation of two models of tension produces the visibility of further types of tension. The following pages are thus an attempt to show how it is possible to not fall into the 'watchdog deviation', how it is possible to expand the account of modes of tension indefinitely without encompassing them in a given, close structure, but

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3   In more abstract terms, one might say that this approach can also stress how, in order to know 'what a thing is', the question 'how' is at least as relevant as the question 'what'.

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nevertheless without falling into the 'homeopathic deviation'. This text shows therefore, via a series of examples, how tension is an open paradigm, always fed by new elements, a paradigm of which the expansion not only *is structured upon*, but also *produces* recurrences and rules.

Our aim is thus double: from a methodological point of view, our aim is to identify tension both as an object of enquiry and as a method of enquiry; as a consequence, from an ontological point of view, our aim is to identify tension as the perspective by which it becomes possible to seize objects not via their categorical classification, but via the analysis of the specific relations in which they are formed, and via the novelties that such relations produce. Tension becomes therefore the perspective through which the essentiality of relations and transformation is brought to centre stage.

1. THE BOW AND THE LYRE

As a starting point of this enquiry I have chosen a classical couplet of examples, the advantage of which is to provide a logical exemplification of a triple twist of tension: firstly, that tension is never accountable as a simple object, but always as a relation between at least two poles; secondly, that one type of tension is never a simple unity, but always tends to split into two; and thirdly, that the dialectic between these parts produces a transformation, in which a further type of tension may be identified. The seminal example, from which the present enquiry in the modelling of abstract types of tensions starts, is a strange object that can be read as a bow and as a lyre simultaneously.

In fact, as one considers the bow and the lyre as possible models of tension, it is their *relation* that appears to be the most interesting. The bow provides the image of a tension that produces an *interruption*: the bow is used to interrupt a life, to create a radical cut in a situation (while the enemy attacks, the strength of the bow can reverse the situation in one's own favour). Whereas the lyre, through its tension, produces a *duration*: a melody, which is a *scan* of time, comes out of the specific mode in which the different strings are put into tension. In a beautiful short text on the origin of philosophy, Giorgio Colli, the editor of the complete works of Nietzsche, observed the existence of a certain reversibility between the two:

> Those tools [the bow and the lyre] were produced starting from an ana-
> logue curved line, and using the same matter, namely the horns of a goat,
> jointed one to the other with a different degree. Thus the works, the effects
> of the bow and the lyre, death and beauty […] express the same divine
> nature, symbolized by the same hieroglyph.[4]

First of all, the difference of their effect is the result of a different degree
of tension applied in the folding of the same object (they are made with
the same material and with the same technique of folding and connect-
ing different parts with a string). The same object with a different ten-
sion splits into two different objects: *a difference of degree, a different
intensity of tension* becomes a *substantial* difference. As Badiou notices,
a tension is interesting first and foremost when it reaches such a point
of splitting:

> The critique of the metaphysical principle of identity must be radical
> enough to assert the thesis [according to which] the being of a transitory
> state of reality is transition itself, i.e. an internal *division* of which this
> state is a stage, a development. It is not enough to say that things are in
> movement, it is necessary to acknowledge also that the very concept of a
> 'thing' does not express a logic of unity, but a logic of scission. […] The
> real is not that which gathers, but that which divides. That which happens
> is that which disjoins.[5]

The bow and the lyre are the same thing (they have the same material
substratum to which a similar type of physical tension is applied), but
it is possible to identify in it a critical point, a given degree of tension
below and above which it appears as one *or* another of the two actual
objects.[6]

In his enquiry, Colli remarks that these two objects are associ-
ated in the figure of Apollo and that, more precisely, the lyre and the
bow in Apollo's hands are the same *thing*. Amongst a quite extensive
iconography, there are only a few artworks in which one can find the

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4   Giorgio Colli, *La nascita della filosofia* (Milan: Adelphi, 1975), pp. 41-42; trans-
    lation is mine.
5   Badiou, *Théorie de la contradiction*, p. 61.
6   Things appear here thus as punctual, specific results of a set of forces which are
    in a mutual tensive relation. As we shall see, this perspective allows for a more
    detailed account not only of what tension is, but also of what a thing is. Namely
    we will see how for philosophy the term 'thing' itself bears witness to an irreducible
    tension that leads philosophy to define it as 'essentially equivoque'.

presence of the two attributes of Apollo, the bow and the lyre, at the same time. In fact Apollo often appears depicted or sculpted with one *or* other of such attributes, as if they formed together a sort of *Kippbild*, i.e. a double image in which only one aspect can be perceived in a given moment, although in each aspect the other, absent term persists or resonates (therefore producing a constant back and forth between the two perceptions). One of the works in which both attributes are visible is Perugino's *Apollo and Marsyas*:[7] the painting depicts Apollo listening to Marsyas – a panic figure who incarnates the Dionysian element. As legend has it, Marsyas was claimed to be the most excellent flautist. A flute is an instrument that deforms the face of the player,[8] an instrument via which beauty and a certain disharmony appear *as one*. It is therefore often associated with a panic world, a world in which the beauty of music is linked to disharmony, even with a certain violence: in fact the force necessary to blow and produce beauty is at the very same time a force producing something ugly (in this sense one can say that it is proper violence, i.e. a force producing disgrace). It might be interesting to remark that this force – which produces at once beauty and violence, harmony and deformity – is for the Greeks the *pneuma,* the principle of life itself. Deformity is a clear manifestation, embedded in the creation of beauty, of the violence that goes with life, for instance in the necessary decay and death of any (beautiful) living form. The legend continues that Apollo – the god of harmony – defies Marsyas in a contest where the Muses are called to judge the best player. After the Muses decree their equality, Apollo decides to make a second challenge, which consists of playing and singing at the same time (once again one can see a certain duality involved). Of course Marsyas, the flute player, cannot bear this duplicity: he loses the contest, and Apollo skins him to death as a consequence for having lost the contest, after having been claimed to be the best musician.[9]

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7   Pietro Vannuci, called il Perugino (1450-1523), *Apollo e Marsia* (Paris, Musée du Louvre).

8   The legend goes that Marsyas picked up the flute that Athena threw away after having been mocked by other gods because her face was deformed while playing. See Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. by James G. Frazer, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), book VI, lines 695-711.

9   There are various and divergent ancient sources for the legend. One which stresses clearly the two phases of the challenge is for instance Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, trans. by C. H. Oldfather, 12 vol (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

What is striking in Perugino's painting is the distant calm that Apollo displays, while in fact he is about to unleash an incredible, deadly violence. One might somehow say that the movement of the *Kippbild* has been caught here, 'frozen' in the in-between moment, in an instant of suspension in which the tension between the two models of tension becomes visible. What the painting suggests by this frozen 'in-betweenness' of two moments is the presence of violence at the origin of the new harmony. With the victory of Apollo a new order is inaugurated, a musical Apollonian order in which music does not entangle grimaces or violent faces, but which substitutes the simultaneity of a duality of beauty and violence with the simultaneity of two beautiful melodies. However the instauration of such an order relies on the most violent gesture: the god who installs a new harmonic order is the same one who punishes those who defy him. What is interesting here is that Apollo is not so much the god of harmony, but the one who doubles harmony by a (violent) gesture of separation between harmony and un-harmony: he is the god for whom the removal of violence from the harmony of music proceeds through a violent gesture of exclusion. And he is also the god who transforms his strength of violence into a strength of harmony. A violent tension which produces an exclusion is reversed into a harmonic tension, into the logic of a harmonic duration, produced by a multiplication of tension in space (the chords of the lyre are multiplied in comparison to the bow) and in time (if each percussion of the chord produces an interruption, the repetition of a series of different percussions produces a scan, or a measurement of time). *A tension is reversed into another*. Apollo, considered by Nietzsche as the figure of the removal of the Dionysian duplicity of the life forces, is actually the character wherein this duplicity exists, but is not perceivable, because it is removed by an extreme moment of tension/intensification that reverses itself into a new harmonic tension. In Apollo, violence and melody no longer form a unity through tension but two mutually excluded poles, each of which is a tension. With a last glance, the relation between these two poles is still perceivable in this suspended moment in which, in an apparent calm, Apollo listens to Marsyas. One therefore normally only sees the lyre of Apollo, and perceives the bow only in the moment of catastrophe. Trapped in the rational order one does not see the duplic-

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University Press, 1933-67), II (1935), book III, §§ 58-59 and III (1939), book V, § 75.

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ity of the underlying forces. As Colli says, 'what Nietzsche has not understood is the double nature of Apollo […] symbolized by the two attributes of the god: the bow, showing his hostile action, and the lyre, showing his benign action'.[10] The element that produces the duration of a vital sound also produced the death of the previous panic world by a violent tension that cuts the previous coexistence of violence and beauty in two. Therefore, a change from a synchronic coalescence of the two types of tensions to a diachronic one is produced here. And as a consequence, from within the harmonic moments of the new diachronic tension between tensions, tension-as-violence is no longer perceived as a constitutive element: one can no longer perceive, for instance, how the duration of a sound is possible only as a result of a violent cut. Consequently 'it is only in the deformed, illusory perspective of our world that these two elements appear as contradictory fragments'.[11]

One can thus finally make a double remark: first, the two tools are the product of the qualitative division of one tension, of which the common origin is forgotten by means of a process of objectualization of the two poles. As Heraclitus' fragments already remarked, 'they (ignorant men) do not know how that which is different harmonizes with itself (*diaferomenon heōutōi omologeei*). Harmony (of what is) stretched in opposite tension, like the bow and the lyre':[12] the 'like' reminds us that

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10 Colli, *La nascita della filosofia*, p. 40.

11 Ibid., pp. 41-42. This is, I presume, one of the reasons why it was so difficult to find an image of the coalescence of these two objects in the iconography of Apollo.

12 Heraclitus, Diels-Kranz B 51 (numbered 45 by Burnet). The translation combines elements taken from the following translations: John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London and Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, 1912), and Giovanni Reale, *I Presocratici, frammenti della raccolta Diels-Kranz* (Milan: Bompiani 2006). A few remarks on the text are necessary. First of all, the term 'different' in the sentence 'that which is different harmonizes with itself (*diaferomenon eotoi omologeei*)', has to be understood as 'that which is differing', 'that which produces a diverging movement'. This idea is then further specified via its complement, i.e. via the idea that there is a '*palintropos harmonie*' ('harmonie' is here a nominative case, and 'palintropos' is its adjective), a 'connection' or 'tuning' 'which moves against or backwards', or also a 'connection' or 'tuning' of '*that which* moves against or backwards'. If we put the two sentences together we see the following: when something differs so radically that it ends by moving backwards, it creates a harmonic closure (a tuning) with the element or point from which it differs. The seminal case is that of taking one extremity of a stick of wood forming

this is only an example for a more general pattern; it reminds us that such a false opposition between models of tension is simply exemplified by the dialectic of the bow and of the lyre, but it is not exclusive to these two objects. And second, it is fundamental to notice that even each one of these instruments is in itself already double: the bow in itself, remarks Heraclitus, is already both life and death. The bow in fact in Greek is *Bios*, which (with the difference of an accent) means also 'life', and therefore 'the bow's name is life, but its work is death'.[13] The model of the bow and of the lyre not only seems to display a duplicity, a unity which divides into two different actions that are incompossible yet intertwined. It also has the characteristic to display how such a duplicity can then be found also in the individual terms.

The question therefore becomes: in this archetypical model, or better: in this seminal example of tension, what is the new term that we discover via the analysis of the dialectic relation of the two types of tension it involves?

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a line and folding it backwards: in this case we have a linear development upon which a tension is applied so as to perform an opposition to the direction of development; and we find that such an opposition produces a conjunction in the point in which one extreme touches the other. The reversed movement of opposition turns into a conjunction, and this produces a new harmonic structure. See to this extent the remarks of M. Marcovich in his introduction to the Editio Maior *Heraclitus: Greek Text with a Short Commentary* (Merida: The Los Andes University Press, 1967), pp. 124-28. All this raises a third question, namely whether – as a literal interpretation of the content of the fragment seems to suggest – the bow and the lyre are just two examples of this model of tension, or whether – as the fact of choosing as examples exactly these two objects which are made of the same matter seems to suggest – such 'harmony of the reverse movement' is also a model that describes the relation between the two objects. It is clear that Colli proposes here this second interpretation. (I wish to thank Christoph Holzhey for his commentaries and for his reading suggestions on the topic).

13 Heraclitus, Diels-Kranz, B48 (numbered 66 by Burnet). Burnet translates 'the bow is called life', but we prefer to use 'bow's name' as a more literal translation of the Greek *onoma*: in fact the expression 'is called' might make the reader think that what is here at stake is a subjective act of naming, while, for what concerns Presocratic philosophy, it would be highly problematic to affirm that names are subjective conventional decisions and not, for instance, essential elements of things or objective effects of their influence on subjects.

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What results from the analysis of the relation between these two terms (the bow and the lyre) is a more accurate perception of some aspects of the temporal dimension of tension. More specifically, *interruption* and *duration* appear as two important elements of tension that have to be taken into account back to back. In fact we have seen that the possibility of installing a duration of harmony is based on the separation of all violent aspects from harmony, and on the consequent concentration of violence in the radical gesture of a cut, of an interruption that eliminates within harmony any kind of ambiguous relationship with violence. A harmonic duration is made possible by the separation of the function of violence, which is condensed in a moment of violent interruption, a moment of violent cut.

Indeed, from the point of view of time, tension can be perceived in two ways: as a *duration*, as a phenomenon that lasts in time, or as an *interruption* that creates the possibility of a radical change. As an example of the first case one can take into account the idea that a living organism is a homeostatic set of tensions that lasts as long as it can counterbalance the entropic set of forces that tend towards the dissolution of this tension into a neutral state. As an example of the second case one can consider the commonsensical idea of tension as a dramatic intensification of facts, which leads to a catastrophic turn, to a radical change. What is then the relation between these two dimensions? With the help of a visual example and of a textual example, these two aspects can be related in two ways. On the one hand, a tension can be created by the intervention of a radical discontinuity that interrupts an anonymous, flat duration of the present. A radical cut, in other words, can not only be the release of a tension, but also the genetic point of a new one. But on the other hand, one might say that this cut does not *exist* if it does not have a set of consequences that unfold it (and that, more precisely, unfold it in a duration). According to this last sense, a work of art that interrupts an academic situation (and the evidences upon which the academy relies) by a revolutionary gesture is nothing if it does not produce some consequences, if there isn't a certain extension, a span, of the consequences that it produces.

In the late 1940s, Lucio Fontana produced (literally) a cut into the surface of the canvas, interrupting in a new manner, by this gesture, the

figurative domain of painting.[14] The interruption was provided not by a simple anti-figurative gesture that expanded painting beyond the limit of representation, or beyond the limits of adequation between subjects and genres; more radically, what was removed was the double adequation itself of the pictorial gesture to the flat surface of the canvas and of the sculptural gesture to three-dimensional matter. But such a gesture, without a series of artworks (from the same artist or from others) that unfold its consequences and make it become more visible, would have remained an immaterial gesture, disappearing in the moment of its appearance, and therefore non existing. It is such an *ex-tension* – provided by the works that follow it – that creates a consistency of the tension, of that tension which originated in the interruption performed by the initial vanishing gesture. In more general terms, one can say that only *the duration of a cut* realizes, makes exist, *the cut of the duration*, i.e. the cut performed into the academic distinction that assigns specific spatialities to specific arts.

A question then arises: what is the specific extension, the specific 'span' of a cut, of an interruption? What is an extension of an interruption that does not transform this interruption into a new tensionless present? Beyond which extension, or under which conditions, do the necessary consequences that provide an artistic gesture with a substantial presence in a situation create a new academia?[15] Is it at the second artwork repeating this gesture? Is it at the third, or the fourth repetition, or at the fifth? At a certain point, after countless repetitions of the cuts, after a constant expansion of the same gesture of cutting, Fontana was considered in cheap talks as the stereotype of contemporary academia, or even as the stereotype of the artist who repeats his gesture each time that he needs to pay an installment for his new villa at the seaside.

Therefore the relation between span and cut, interruption and duration (what is the duration of an interruption?) opens towards the necessity to name in a more precise way the regime of the temporal consequences of a new tension introduced into a scene. More precisely, it seems that a double dialectic is possible between these two terms. What is the relation between the interruption of a duration, of a consistent

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14 One can see in particular the famous photo by Ugo Mulas, *Lucio Fontana, Milano,* (1964), where Fontana is caught in the act of cutting the canvas.

15 In politics, the question arising is for instance: where is the point in which the realization of a political revolution turns into a new form of State consistency?

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order of time, and the consistent order of time of this same interruption? This double dialectic is seized, as Deleuze noticed, by the conception of time by the first Stoa, for which time is conceivable only as being at once continuous and discontinuous: each present moment, in order to be identifiable, has to be something else than its immediate predecessor, and at the same time, in order to exist, it must express a certain duration.

Time is thus possible only as the interruption of a duration, which at the same time is also the duration of an interruption. It is for this reason that Deleuze insists on the fact that time is double for the Stoics. On the one hand, time is *Chronos*, the continuity of the present, time as a well-ordered succession of presents in which each instant is the effect of the previous instant, which is its cause. On the other hand, time is *Aion*, 'the past and future [which] inhere or subsist in time',[16] time seized as the infinite totality of all the present, past and future moments, which is expressed in a different manner at each present moment: each moment condenses in a specific manner the totality of time, each present instant of a thing is a condensation of the whole universe, expressing the latter under a unique perspective. Thus in this second sense each moment is not the causally determined result of the previous one, but it is radically other than the previous and the following one. It is because of this second aspect that time endures the constant discontinuity that characterizes it. But without the first aspect, this discontinuity itself would not properly exist, but would be a pure succession of vanishing points, lacking of any possible duration. Therefore each present moment is the tension between a duration of an order of the present, and a totality of time, 'a future and past' that 'divide the present at every instant, and subdivide it ad infinitum':[17] the second is necessary in order to create the discontinuity of the first, which makes time change and pass, the first is necessary in order for this discontinuity to exist. The present is, in other words, the minimal point of tension between these two dimensions, and in each present moment, the two dimensions of time are true: 'time has only the present with which to express the internal subversion of the present in time'.[18] Thus the Stoics identify the *existence* of time with an extension (the present) in which the totality of time itself insists as a

16 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (London: Athlone, 1990), p. 164.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.

force of change: 'time is an extension (*diastema*) […]. Only the present exists, past and future are, but they do not subsist actually'.[19] But in this extension (*diastema*) all the past and the future insist, producing a radical discontinuity within the present as duration, as extension, itself. And in fact, the word *diastema* in Greek has a double meaning: extension or duration, but also interruption, which in contemporary language is for instance expressed by the word *interval*. In other terms, *diastema* is the name of time, caught in its only existing, *present* form, which is a twice-tensive form: a first tension which is the one of a discontinuity affecting a duration, thereby allowing time to exist as a constant change, and a second one, which is the necessary present extension of such an interruption. Each present moment can provide such a cut that inscribes a difference in the continuous flow of the present only if it is provided with a duration. This is because each present moment manifests itself as an inner contradiction, between a discontinuity of the present and a lasting presence of such a discontinuity: without this double logic, the present itself, each present, would disappear, it would either vanish in a pure ephemeral interruption, in a void with no extension, or crystallize itself in a duration without difference.

Here, a more abstract and precise terrain for a previous question arises: how can a present moment, a new change, escape its ephemeral, inexistent dimension, without at the same time disappearing in a new form of crystallization of time? How can a present moment extend itself in time without disappearing in a pure indifferent continuity? It is via the analysis of *suspense* that one can have a more precise account of this perspective.

3. CLIMAX AND SUSPENSE: TENSION IN TIME

The temporal extension of an interruption, the proper duration of a cut performed into a duration, seems to take (at least) two possible forms:[20] it can take the form of a cut provided with a certain extension or dura-

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19 Chrisyppus, SVF II 509 1, translated using Greek text and Roberto Radice's Italian edition of the von Arnim Collection *Stoici Antichi, tutti i frammenti* (Milan: Bompiani, 2002).
20 I owe a lot, for this point, to a series of discussions with the Australian filmmaker Siouxzi L. Mernagh, *alumna* of the Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry.

tion, which suspends the structure of a situation, or it can take the form of a cut which is the turning point of a dramatic intensification of the structures of the situation, and that therefore finally results in a qualitative change. In the first case, the duration of an interruption follows the initial moment of interruption and, more accurately, it allows us to recognize it retrospectively. In fact, an interruption in itself is nothing. Having no extension or substance, it appears as a pure immaterial gesture, as an *accidental*, almost imperceptible, disturbance. It is only in its consequences that it becomes real, that it acquires that duration by which it comes into existence: the production of a substantive extension of its consequences forms something like the *corpus*, the body in which it is substantively realized. And this body of consequences is not only what one can indicate, but also the starting point from which one can retrospectively perceive, indicate and name its existence. What is obtained via such an extension of the interruption is properly a state of suspension of the situation in which this interruption appears. In the second case, by contrast, an interruption is operated as a dramatic turn produced as a logical result of an intensification. When a change in a situation and in its temporality is not produced by an interruption of the logical order of the present, but by the progressive and constant intensification of this same logic, this same intensification can result in an interruption. In this case, the interruption is not a minimal fracture that is retrospectively realized by a continuous series of consequences, (as in the case of the suspension), but is the qualitative leap produced by the quantitative accumulation of a given continuity, of a given duration. This second model is the one of the *climax*, which is therefore the structural opposite to the suspension.

In narrative terms, moments of narrative suspension (as in the case of wandering, oniric sequences, but also, as will be seen, suspense as it appears in thrillers or horror movies) and climax seem to be two opposite modes of extension of a tension: suspension works by extension of a present moment subtracted from the normal order of time (it is the duration of a cut); climax, on the contrary, is an intensification which preludes to a cut, to a dramatic turn. The dramatic turn certainly has strong durable effects, but these effects are nonetheless the dialectical result of the intensification of a normal temporality of the situation. In Hegelian terms, climax seems to be a moment of production of a qualitative leap from a quantitative accumulation, while moments of sus-

pense or narrative suspension seem to be a radical change that cannot be dialectically subsumed in the story, because they are *suspended* from it.

Although formally opposed, these two modalities of tensive relations between interruption and duration have a mutual relation, as a recent distant debate between Jean-Luc Godard and Jacques Rancière on the power proper to cinema helps to establish. This debate revolves around the nature of the relation between the normal unfolding of a story of a film, and a moment of suspense inserted in it. More precisely, the debate revolves around the nature of suspense, namely if it is a pure state of suspension separated from the ordinary timeline of a film (a story provided with its own dramatic climax), or if it is a tool that allows the intensification of the story, thus producing the possibility of a dramatic turn.[21]

By way of a specific magnification of this problem up to a cosmological perspective, Jean-Luc Godard presents, in the fourth video-volume of *Histoire(s) du Cinéma,* the first option, claiming that the space of suspense is properly subtracted from all narrative logic, because it offers a pure filmic, non-narrative, sensorial tension. The space of suspense thereby proceeds from a cut into the story and appears as an extension which suspends the continuous duration of the present (i.e. a suspension of the plot); it unfolds a non-chronological time in which one can have access to another, deeper dimension of the real, where the forces and the tensions underlying the crust of phenomena and banal stories can finally be revealed. Godard writes:

> We've forgotten why Joan Fontaine leans over the edge of the cliff and what exactly Joel McCrea went to do in Holland. We've forgotten what Montgomery Clift's eternal silence keeps and why Janet Leigh stops at the Bates Motel and why Teresa Wright is still crazy about her Uncle Charlie. We've forgotten what it is that Henry Fonda is not exactly guilty of and

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21 Both authors start from the consideration that suspense, as we know it in horror or thriller movies, is not what at first glance would appear: a dramatic turn, a moment of unfolding of the logic of the film. On the contrary, the primary function would consist in revealing a different logic than the one of the explicit narrative: the realm of dreams, of a hidden or forgotten nature, or of an unknown event that might happen and that we cannot fully anticipate following the logic of the facts, etc. In this sense suspense is a specific case of narrative suspension; it keeps the story on hold and it even undoes it, instead of doing it. Nonetheless, as we shall see through Rancière's remarks, the narrative logic and the suspension of this logic are at once connected and disconnected.

to what end the American government hired Ingrid Bergman. But we do remember a purse, a bus in the desert, a glass of milk, the sails of a wind-mill, a hairbrush. We remember a row of bottles, a pair of glasses, a musical score, a bunch of keys, because with and through these Alfred Hitch-cock succeeds where Alexander, Julius Cesar, Hitler and Napoleon had all failed: he takes control of the universe.[22]

Cinema is here presented as the art of a generalized suspension, and suspension as the technique that allows us to perceive the true nature of things, the non-objectual, tensive nature of things: in order to perceive the power of each thing, the images have to be subtracted from the narrative logic of the duration of the present, via a procedure of suspension. The creation of a realm of pure suspended images is therefore presented as the door to discovering tension as the true nature of things: tension is revealed as pure suspension, where it appears as the key to the universe (as in the moment of suspense in bad horror movies when entering the haunted house one discovers a deeper world suspended from the ordinary logics of the present and of the story). More specifically, as the voice-over at the end of the excerpt suggests, it is by the process of *montage* that images can be subtracted, suspended from the stories, thus composing with them a style, a gesture, which reveals the tensive mechanisms of the universe: this is why, as he states at the end, 'art is nothing else than the way in which forms transform themselves into style'.[23]

Confirming and reversing the very logic of this claim, Jacques Rancière stresses how this suspension – which in itself works exactly as Godard describes – is nothing else than the most powerful trigger on which the story – the order of the narration of the present – can rely, in order to *continue* its own narration, to continue with its own present, and to re-absorb tension. The idea of suspension as the door opened on the secrets of tension can thus be reversed: suspension can be interpreted as a tool of intensification of the present – as a tool that produces an intensification of the story, leading thus towards the production of a dramatic turn, of a cut which is in fact a dramatic *resolution* of the story – and not a radical change of it. Godard's argument, Rancière says, 'as such, is easily refuted':

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22 Jean-Luc Godard, *Histoire(s) du cinema* (Paris: Gaumont, 1997), IV, Episode 1 [on DVD].
23 Ibid.

Godard, clearly, makes his point by dissociating things that are indissociable. We don't remember the bottles of Pommard in *Notorious* because of their pictorial qualities but because of the emotional charge that the narrative situation has invested in them. The bottle that wobbles and falls interests us because it contains the uranium Alicia and Devlin are looking for; because we know that while they're searching the wine cellar, the champagne at the reception upstairs is running out and Alicia's husband Sebastian, a Nazi agent, will presently step down to the cellar with his butler to fetch some more, hear the bottle falling, and notice that his key to the cellar is missing because Alicia has taken it. The same goes for all the images Godard evokes: in every case, *it is the narrative situation that lends importance to the objects*. It is easy, then, to refute Godard's argument. *The problem, though, is that Godard doesn't oppose arguments, he opposes images*. What we see running parallel with this discourse are other images made from Hitchcock's images. The glass of milk, the keys, the glasses, and the bottles.[24]

Godard does not oppose argument to argument, thing to thing, present to present, but he opposes tensive relations between images to arguments that put objects into a logic structure. He opposes one thing (as tension) to itself (as thing) by suspending the narrative logic in which it appears as a thing and thereby reveals the thing as a knot of tensions: from inside such space of suspension in which things become visible as tensions, one can follow the lines of the forces involved in these tensions, and therefore gain a perspective insight into the mechanics of the thing (and ultimately inside the mechanics of the universe). In other terms, Godard explicitly 'forgets' to engage with the dialectical function of these moments of suspense/suspension, and conversely focuses on their intrinsic potentiality. Rancière's argument is therefore correct (indeed the moments of suspension highlighted by Godard receive their aesthetic value by the dramatic structure of the plot that is reflected in them), but at the same time it appears here that Godard operates a radical choice: from the perspective of suspension for which he decides, the very point of view of Rancière loses its effectiveness.

Here a predicament is touched upon, and is structured on three levels. On the first level, from a temporal point of view, tension can be structured as an interruption of a duration, *or* as a duration of an interruption. On the second level – via the dialectics of suspense and climax – a duration of an interruption is at the same time the moment

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24 Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), p. 180.

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of possible *Aufhebung*, sublation of the original duration which is interrupted: the suspense as an extension of an interruption in the story is the moment in which the story feeds its own structure, allowing the subsequent production of a dramatic turn. This is why the tension of the suspense can be understood only starting from the dramatic content of the film. Thirdly and finally, the space of suspense is at the same time an essential element of the general structure of the film and a moment in which something else appears under it. It is therefore undecidable which of these two senses one has to choose. In other words, there is a tension between suspense as the perspective point that allows us to discover tensions under the surface of well structured narratives and phenomena (and that therefore allow us to suspend or even disrupt this narrative logic), and suspense as a structural element of the logics of the narration, as a moment of dialectical tension that is finally reabsorbed in the normal development of a situation. Given this undecidability, one cannot *calculate* which of the two options is the correct one, but has to decide: decisions can in fact take place only on what is undecidable (otherwise one calculates options, but does not decide). Thus it is only an *act of choice* that can decide (in the literal sense of *de-caedere*, to perform a separation, a cut) and determine if the duration of the interruption is what produces the existence of the interruption or if it produces the reabsorption of the interruption inside the logic of the situation.

4. CENTRE, EDGES, UNDECIDABLE POINT: THE SPATIAL DIMENSION OF TENSION

This analysis of the duration of tension raises the question as to whether or not the extension of a tension is relevant to understand its relation to the situation in which it appears. It is clear that a decision needs to be taken concerning the relation between the point of tension and the situation in which it appears. The decision concerns this undecidable question: to what extent does this point suspend the situation in which it appears? And to what extent is it, on the contrary, an element of it? If such temporal perspective on tension points towards a tensive undecidability, it might then be relevant to see if some decisive elements are provided by the spatial analysis of such points of tension.

From the preceding analysis of suspense, it has emerged that a point of particular tension – a point wherein the tension underlying each object is revealed – is a point which is at the same time part of the situation (this is why it can be reabsorbed as a turning point of the dramaturgy of this situation) and not part of it (it is different from the rest of the situation, of which it suspends the logic, by an intensification of the manifestation of its contradictions). Such points, that at once belong and do not belong to the situation, seem to appear in three possible spatial determinations. First, a point of tension can be located at the very centre of the situation. This is, for instance, the case of the classical absolute monarchic sovereign, who on the one hand is the central point from which the law of the situation symbolically proceeds, and on the other is subtracted from this very law. Second, tension can also be located at the edges of the situation, where the laws of the situation are weaker, as in the case of a revolt that upraises on the distant borders of a vast empire, putting into question what belongs and what does not belong to the common space. And finally, a situation can have an undeterminable point as a point of maximal tension, a point the existence of which is known, but that one is not able to locate: this is, for instance, the case of a known threat that, exploiting the blind spots of a situation, produces evident effects but the precise nature and location of which are unknown. In all these different typologies, tension thus appears to be located in points which on the one hand condensate, synthesize the several tensions of the situation, and which on the other hand exceed them. Jean Terrier, ICI alumnus, researcher in social and political theory, has suggested a textual example for a point of intensification of tension that appears to integrate these three spatial aspects. Carl Schmitt, in *Theory of the Partisan*, defines the partisan as follows:

> In partisan battle a complexly structured new space of action emerges, because the partisan does not fight on an open field of battle nor on the same plane of open frontal war. Rather, he forces his enemy into another space. To the space of the regular traditional theater of war he, thus, adds another, darker dimension, a dimension of depth, in which the displayed uniform becomes deadly. In this way he provides an unexpected (but no less effective for that) terrestrial analogy to the sub-marine, which likewise adds an unexpected dimension of depth to the surface of the sea, where old-fashioned naval warfare was once played out. From underground, he disturbs the conventional and regular game on the open stage. On the basis of his irregularity, he alters dimensions not only of tactical, but of strategic operations of the regular army. Exploiting their privileged relation to

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and at the ground, relatively small groups of partisans can tie down large masses of regular troops.[25]

Without entering into the complicacy and the implication of this text in relation to Schmitt's work, it seems important to underline how this text condensates the three spatial figures of spatial tensions in one example. The partisan is actually at the same time *unassignable* to a place (highly mobile), and absolutely *central* (she is characterized not as a frontal enemy, nor as a guerrilla-style ambush fighter, but as a sort of chthonian force that pops up from the ground, in the middle of the situation of conflict). At the same time she is *external*: she is not considered as the classical enemy, as the dialectical other, with whom one shares the battlefield although on opposite sides, but she is on the contrary considered as non-existent in – and even as the non-existent of – the war situation. For instance fascists did not consider the partisans as enemies, but as bandits (in the literal sense of banned out of the situation, although undeniably internal to it) and therefore war conventions were not applied to them. For that reason the coexistence of these three spatial factors made of the partisans a major point of tension – even bigger than the actual military results that they have obtained –, a fact which allowed them to become – in Italy for instance – the main symbolic reference around which the post-war political situation has globally identified its structures. Indeed, such an element that appears in this triple spatial mode of tension is inconsistent with the current logic of appearance of objects in the situation, but at the same time the multiple mode of its manifestation renders it impossible to deny its presence. The inconsistency of the partisans' presence is as undeniable as the strength of their presence: they fight the fascist order without entering in a warfare dialectic with it, and they derive their efficacy by displaying their incompatibility with the space, the time and the laws in which the fascists operate. Therefore only a radical restructuring of the laws of the situation – those laws according to which their appearance is inconsistent – can be the outcome of the victory of such intensive manifestation. Once again, the tension between such an inconsistency and such a strength cannot be solved but by a decision: either the space in which they don't exist or a radically new one.

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25 Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2004), pp. 48-49.

The essentiality of such figures of tension – which are stretched in a further tension between the strength and the inconsistency of their appearance – can be seized using an example referring to a non-extensive space, namely the discursive space of philosophy. More precisely, after having claimed in the beginning that this enquiry does not concern tension as an 'object of analysis' (as if it was some-'thing') but as a *mode* of constituting things, and having claimed that the shift of perspective from objects to tension can provide an essential explanation that accounts at once for forms and for their transformation, we will see here that this approach does not concern a specific category of phenomena, but concerns every-thing, concerns, for philosophy, both each thing and the idea of the 'thing' in its generality.

First and foremost, the word 'thing' appears to be highly difficult to locate in the space of philosophy. In fact, the term 'thing' is too vague, too large to enter inside a proper philosophical language: the word 'thing' usually does not appear to enter inside the vocabulary of philosophy, in which one can rather find – depending on different authors and schools – a series of more precise 'substitutes', such as object, body, shape, form, substance, essence, etc. Of course one can identify a few counter-examples, amongst which Heidegger is probably the best known. But even in such cases, when the term 'thing' is not kept out of the space of philosophy, the term seems to endure a difficult life inside of it. In the case of Heidegger, the word 'thing' is divided as soon as it hits the philosophical surface, specified as *Sache* and *Ding*, which makes it become more digestible by a classical philosophical appetite for analysis. The same can be said of Descartes, for whom *res* is analysed only in terms of its division into *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. Too vague for the sharpness of philosophy, the question concerning the 'thing' seems thus to circulate on the edges of philosophy. But lurking in this border space, and not being really excluded from it, it provokes – as the cases of Heidegger and Descartes show – a constant transcription of itself, via the proliferation of other, more precise, philosophical terms.

But this localization is not sufficient, because at the same time the 'thing' – the material, multiple, sensible, changing, indeterminate, excessive and multiple 'things' that philosophy keeps at its edges – reappears also at its very centre, in the question 'what is?'. 'What is?' is the question where no specific object appears, where one acknowledges simply that some-thing is there, but no other property than the 'thingness' of the thing is known. This question is nothing else than the classical, cen-

tral question of ontology, it is the question where the problem of the essence appears in its most non-determinative fashion. The philosophical question concerning essence is in fact possible only insofar as it is abstracted from the specificity of such or such other object, it is only possible insofar as it concerns every *thing, the thing in its indeterminacy*.[26] The confused, not sufficiently determined 'thing' which crawls around the edges of philosophy appears at the same time at the very centre of philosophy, introducing in it the necessary indeterminacy of the essence-as-such.

The equivocity, the indeterminacy of the thing that gravitates towards the edges of philosophy seems to be bound to the absence of determination needed in order to respond to the question of being in its more abstract form. Aristotle noticed how being (the very fact that each thing 'is') is in fact necessarily equivocal and his argument unfolds as follows: in the opening of the *Categories* he indicates that normally all equivocity can be reduced to a uniqueness of sense, via two possible procedures. Firstly, is the case of homonymy, such as using 'man' both for a man in flesh and bones, and for a man in a painting: but such a type of equivocity can be reduced by finding two different words that can designate the two objects. Secondly, is the case of synonymy, such as when one says 'animal' both for a man and for a cow: in this case both are undeniably *essentially* animals. But the point is that, in this case, 'animal' only defines their common genre: although both are essentially animals, the essence of each of the two species is not completely defined by their 'animality'. Thus in order to name the essential difference between a man and a cow one also has to specify the essential character of each species: in other words, 'animal' is synonymically predicated (as a second substance) in the first substance of both the man and of the cow, for which one has different names at one's disposal.[27]

The point is that homonymy and synonymy form together *almost* the totality of possible equivocity: something is left out. Aristotle in *Metaphysics* Delta 7,[28] notices that there is one, and only one, term the equivocity of which cannot be reduced either to a case of homonymy

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26 Italian is illuminating to this regard: 'what is?', this question with no specific object other than the indeterminacy of every-thing, is expressed as 'cosa è?', literally, 'thing is?'.

27 See Aristotle, *Categories*, 1 a 1-20.

28 See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Delta 6-8.

or to a case of synonymy: this term is 'being'. 'Being' means 'to be' by essence or by accident, by power or by act, by matter or by shape, but there is no meta-sense of these various senses: when I say that Socrates is a man, and that Socrates is standing, I cannot say that in one case the use of the verb 'to be' is appropriate and that in the other is not; but at the same time I cannot consider these two senses as two specifications of a sense which would embrace both. This entails that 'to be', the fact that 'a thing' 'is', is, as such, radically equivocal.

A tension provided by a radical indeterminacy circulates at the same time in 'each thing' (in the sense of all the 'things' that do not find a position as concepts inside philosophy), and in 'everything' (in the universal sense of 'being' that is said of everything which is). A tension found at the same time at the edges of philosophy and in its centre is therefore unfolded at the centre of each 'thing', as a split which divides each 'thing' from itself: 'a thing' is not simply a given present object, but it is something of which the sense cannot be reduced to a univocal determination. And this is why the knowledge of what a 'thing' is requires the analysis of the tension between its different senses, a tension which takes place, as has been discussed, in the specific modes of its transformation.

CONCLUSION: MULTIPLICATION OF TENSIONS

A 'thing' is therefore by essence undecidable: it is a tension expressing itself as form and as transformation, as a transformation upon a form, and as a form of a transformation, as a transformation attacking a form at its edges and at its centre, and as a transformation which is essential in order to define this very same form. This complexity or co-implication of layers in which one is called to decide where to resolve a tension in order to produce its further, stronger articulation, can be synthesized, as a final gesture, via an example taken from Paul Klee's notes for his classes at the Bauhaus.

Paul Klee notices, at the very opening of his sketchbooks, how each single point has, in the eyes of the observer, a chaotic aspect, because it is always an 'undecidable complex': whenever one considers a given point as a minimal element, this point, as little as one might pick it, is not, in fact, an elementary particle but an in-between of a series of opposites. It is neither uni- nor multi-dimensional, neither big nor small,
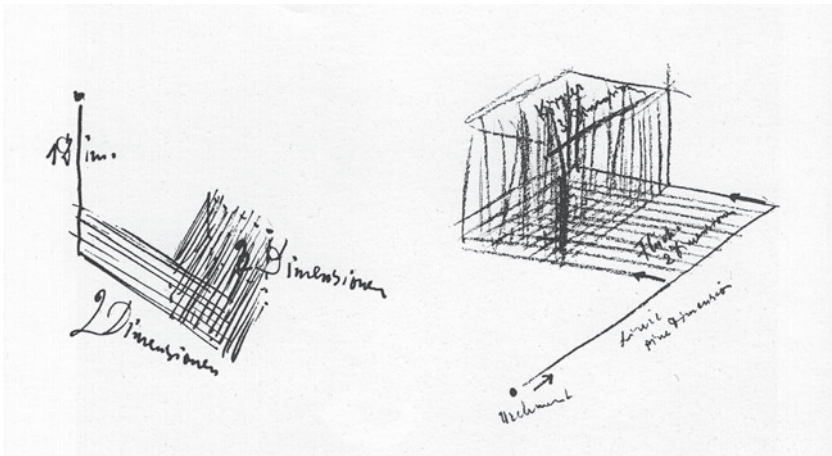
Fig. 1. Paul Klee, *Notebooks*, 2 vols (New York, Wittenborn, 1961-73),
II: *The Nature of Nature* (1973), p. 301.

neither stable nor in movement.[29] And if it displays such in-between-
ness, it is because first and foremost it has 'an internal tension'. An
internal tension that at the same time produces its shape and its move-
ment: it produces on the one hand the transformation of its shape, and
on the other hand it produces the shape as an extensive existence of
this same transformation. Therefore *one cannot decide if a given object*
(that can be understood either as a sum of points or as the result of the
movement of a point) *is a shape that endures a transformation, or is a
movement that acquires a shape, and that appears as a shape in a given
moment*: the only choice, which is typical of Klee's work, is to display a
form *together with* the genetic process of its formation, and to display
also the partial forces acting on this form, together with a certain form
or condensation of their activity.

The complicacy of these 'formal' forces – in which it appears how a
form is interrupted by a set of forces, and how a force can only act if it
acquires a minimum of form – can be summarized as follows: on a first
level, the present form of an object appears as the result of a '*Spannung*'
(tension), of an extension, it appears as the 'in between' of a series of
forces ←→, as a zone of suspension or equilibrium (as Freud noticed in

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29 Paul Klee, *Notebooks*, 2 vols (New York: Wittenborn, 1961-73), I: *The Thinking
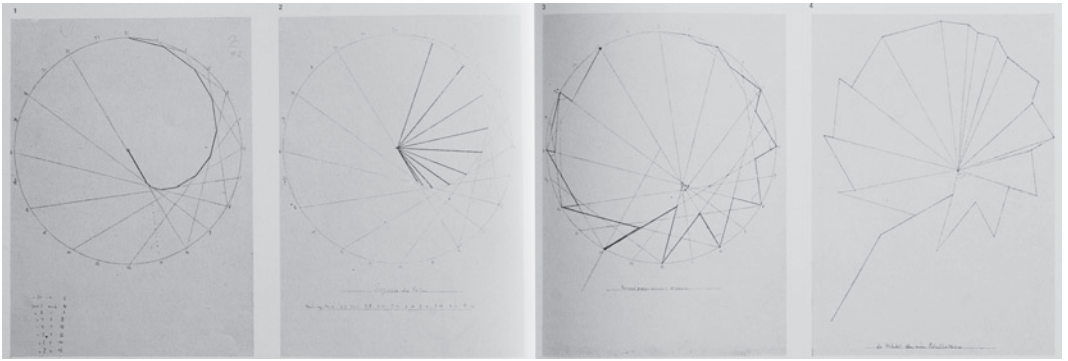Eye* (1961), pp. 3-7.

Fig. 2. Klee, *Notebooks*, II, pp. 18-19.

Beyond the Pleasure Principle) from the influences of external aggressive forces. Second, a given being appears at the same time as a constructive process ⟶, as a drive towards accomplishing a form via a transformation. The *span*, the extension of a given form, is inseparable from a *drive*, it is inseparable from its movement of transformation. The tension is thus always combined: *span* and *Trieb* (*drive*). This is why, for Paul Klee, the simplest account of the form of production of a phenomenon starting from the tension that inhabits its components, is the spiral, which is the combination of an extension and a directional arrow, of a *Spannung* and a *Trieb* (Fig. 2).[30]

Third, each one of these models of tension composing the definition of the spiral (the span and the drive) is in itself double. In fact, for instance, a 'span' is the shape conceived as an extension, as the result of a movement of extension resisting external forces of aggression →(←→)←. But at the same time a tension as span is also the opposite of an expansion, it is the tension of an object resisting entropy, the ten-

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30 Siouxzi L. Mernagh's suggestions have been very important in order to drive my attention on the composite nature of movement of the spiral. Of course (I owe this remark to Christoph Holzhey) in order to obtain a spiral, one needs also a movement of rotation. Klee does not seem to insist specifically on this point, but one can notice how the combination of a series of forces (external forces, internal forces resisting to these, and internal forces of growth) produces a spiral, because it is very unlikely that the different forces work on the same axis and in opposite directions so as to produce a linear movement. The combination of forces (internal and external) on different axes would thus likely produce a spiral form, intended as a composition of a rotational and of an expansive movement.

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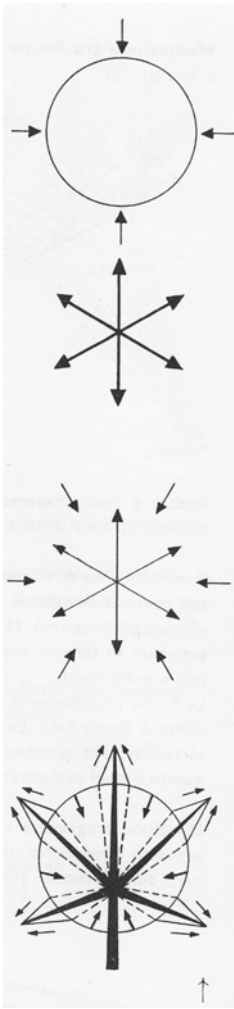
sion of an object that tries to 'make one', delaying its own dissolution ←(→←)→. To this extent, for Klee, the actual shape of an object is possible only via a tension of extension coming from inside, stabilizing itself (temporarily) into a given form under the combined forces of the outside (as in the visual example of the generation of a leaf in Fig. 3).

The formula of a being seized as tension would then be a spiral (a combination of an extension ←→, and a drive ⟶), integrated with a force from outside that tends to compress it →←. The complete schema of the form/tension thus develops as follows:

1) a point, being at once force and form, is already in movement; 2) this movement is the combination of a *Trieb* and a span, and therefore produces a spiral, 3) each turn of the spiral identifies a form: a point is thus nothing else than a form in movement which is artificially considered as the minimal element (in Fig. 4 one can see that a cube is nothing other than a larger point);[31] 4) this spiral is subjected to external forces to which it resists (this is one of the two senses of the span). The complete schema of the simplest possible real form is thus a three-dimensional leaf growing in a spiral, which one derives from combining the three images.

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31 Therefore not only a 'span', but also a 'drive' is double: in one sense a 'drive' is identifiable with a set of tensions leading together towards the accomplishment of a form, of a more or less stabilized mode of appearance, but at the same time a transformation is always the transformation of a form. Tension does not thus come chronologically before the form, but it is important to seize it as being more than a simple accident affecting forms, as thus having a certain ontological primacy, or at least a clear ontological co-extension with form.
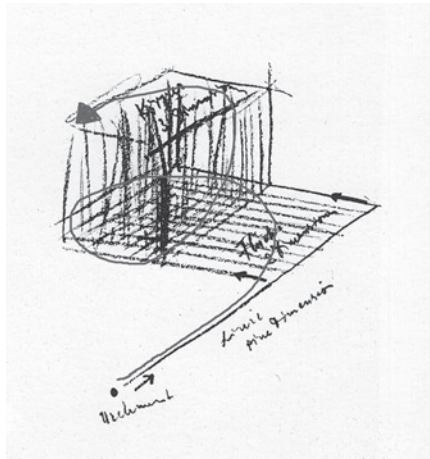
Fig. 4. Klee, *Notebooks*, II, p. 301
(indication of the spiraliform movement
constituting the cube added by B.B.).

All these elements, these layers of tensions – usually defined as being divided in essential and accidental, internal and external – all have the same ontological relevance in the definition of what a 'thing' is: a 'thing' is the layered process of interruption of a state of fact by a system of tensions that are not reducible to a common denominator, and in which each single tension can exist only insofar as it has an actual, concrete extension and duration. The result of this definition is triple. First, on an ontological level it helps us to unfold some aspects of the fact that the definition of the essence of an object, the definition of what an object is, is indissociable from its praxicality, from what 'it does' and from what 'is done with and of it'. Second, this definition of the object as *an undecidable tension between a form under tension and the form of a tension* appears to be inseparable from *the necessity to posit a moment of decision*, a moment in which a subject is forced to choose, i.e. to select amongst all objects those in which the processes that defines them is most evident and most promising. Third, we have seen that such a necessity to decide upon moments of tensive undecidability always leads to the *identification of new modes of tension*. Because of this, it appears that the proper form for an account of tension is to maintain – or more precisely to produce – an open encyclopedia of the proliferation of its senses. And this is an endless task in which things appear as essentially poietic, productive and able to produce novelty.

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