

REVIEW

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Opportunities for Further Examinations of the Form of the Form

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"If you are looking for your heart's desire, and it isn't in your own backyard, you never lost it to begin with." Thus the lesson learned by Dorothy Gale in *The Wizard of Oz*. I want to argue here that some of the key notions that Baecker, like Luhmann, has found in the work of George Spencer-Brown have an important root in earlier German work that may have profound implications for our notion of communication, and that there is an important opportunity here for a fruitful return to certain neo-Kantians.

Judgment had always been a fascinating faculty for enlightenment philosophy. It is seen both as the *severing* faculty (Hölderlin: Judgment [*Urteilun*g] is the primordial division [*Ur-Teilun*g]), especially in contrast to the *imagination*, which tends to connect; but judgment is also – especially in the "grammatical" theories of cognition – that which *joins* concepts, for to make a judgment is to say "this is that," which means to employ the form of the assertion.

This equivocal nature of judgment was central for the work of neo-Kantian Emil Lask, who emphasized that one of the results of Kant's critique had been to collapse the subject/predicate form with the material/category form. More simply, the "form of the form," as it appeared to the nineteenth century, was actually a new creation, and one that had several ambiguities in it. Indeed, this very ambiguity in judgment seems rooted in a conflation Lask pointed to between *Geladstform* and *Strukturform* – judgment divides according to the former, and unites according to the latter. Lask's work – which I find difficult and baffling – seems to offer a more fundamental challenge to this notion of what a form might be than that of the Marburg school, culminating in Cassirer's monumental theory of symbolic forms. It also seems to have a number of striking similarities to some thoughts of Charles Sanders Peirce, as he abandoned the subject-predicate logic and embraced a relational logic (again, which I find difficult and baffling). When we say "A is B," Peirce – like Lask – claimed that we should divide this into [matter/form] as $\{ \{A, B\} / _ \}$, as opposed to the grammatical $[A/B]$. What is being imposed on the matter is the form of the form, in this case, predication.

Now Peirce was heavily influenced not only by Kant but by Schelling – and he certainly shared Schelling's

passion for triadic thinking. But more important, he shared Schelling's understanding of the reason for its need, namely to overcome the mutual indifference of elements that arises with thought. A third is always necessary to mediate, and to connect. The puzzle that we frequently have is that we are not always clear as to when the simple juxtaposition of A and B itself provides the third, in the way that our visual system often adds a black line between adjacent fields of different hues. While elevating juxtaposition into relation, and relation into connection, is immediately attractive, and is often found in that relational thinking that sometimes claims to owe itself to Cassirer, it is too simple – akin to saying that the relation of indifference (in the standard English sense, not Schelling's sense) between A and B, as a relation, therefore brings A and B into an association, and therefore transcends the indifference (becoming indifference now precisely in Schelling's sense). It is very much like claiming a reality for the virtual black line in the visual field.

As many followers of Spencer-Brown will argue, the distinction is not only the primordial division – a rupture in the unity or firstness of the universe. It is also that which brings the inner and outer into a meaningful relation, and is, in a real sense, the primordial copula. And here I would like to back up a bit further, to one of Schelling's influences, Giordano Bruno. Bruno, burned as a heretic at the dawn of the very unpleasant 17th century, was one of the first scientists – and one of the last magicians. To Bruno, a magician was, above all else, concerned with *binding* – connecting one soul to another. The exemplar of this act is love magic – forcing another to love one, in what Max Weber called "the most intimate coercion of the soul of the less brutal partner" – but this is formally identical to all other forms of binding.

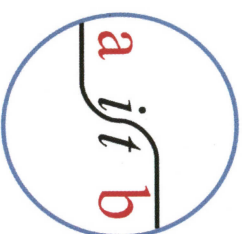
I wish to simply highlight how different Bruno's starting point is from our own. We assume that the baby is born in an oceanic one-ness and the "reality" principle requires a series of *fissions*, of *fissures*, in order to create the adult; individuals are only produced from the plenum of Durkheim's horde by functional differentiation, and so on. There is something quite *bourgeois* in the insistence that we give up the childish unification of imagination and impose a taxonomy of categories, "a place for everything, and everything in its place." To emphasize – as did Engels – that Kant's own theory had much of the bourgeois in it should detract neither from Kant nor from the bourgeoisie. Neither have been obviously eclipsed by their rivals. Yet serious rivals may still enter the lists.

I am not claiming that Bruno believed that, in the absence of binding, all matter would cease its inter-relatedness and seize up into a dead indifference. Rather, he accepted – as had Platonists for centuries – that such binding was possible because all things already *were* connected. But he, like a number of other interesting theorists, started from the assumption that all things gave off bits of themselves. Just

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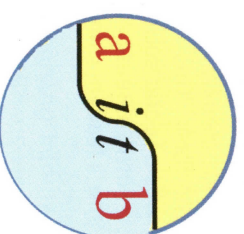
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as the scent of a flower wafts away in all directions, so light, sound, and love, radiate outwards and affect other eyes, ears, and imaginations.

How does one force another to love one? The answer may seem so ludicrous to us that we will burst out laughing. We use these portals – the eyes, the ears, the imagination – to bind. We make ourselves look attractive. We speak convincing words. We paint a picture in the imagination. Bruno's magician is not very different from what we might now (in the United States) call a "pick up artist." Why did this strike him, but not us, as a form of magic?

The answer to this question returns us to one of Baecker's interests, namely the importation of Aristotle's logic into our own. When Aristotle gave his famous list of *kategories*, these were *predicates*, things that "could be said" about a subject. Indeed, it seems that *kategoria* originally meant *accusation*, as the subject was one who was a defendant in a trial (a treasured pastime of the Greeks who, when not fighting those of another city, enjoyed suing those of their own). To the Greeks, the essential thing about what we call "reason" (*logos*) was that it was a *speech*, made to persuade. It was, in essence, a form of mind control – one's own thoughts waft outwards, enter the mind of another through the ears, and change his own thoughts, and hence actions. The revolution

brought by Socrates was the marvelous meta-rhetoric of a rhetoric that trumped all others because it claimed to be *more* than rhetoric. In Aristotle, we see not only the beginning of the form of the form, but the end of speech, at least, speech in its wild, untamed, and irresponsible form.

Marvelously, in Kant, these categories have turned into *a priori*s of the intellect – no longer about a pragmatic and interpersonal relation of radiating one's own thought outwards by *persuading*, but now a relation between an isolatable subject and the surrounding world. The form of the assertion and the form of the category have become entangled. (Since then, for many of us, category and class became further entangled, as the only category we could defend became the category of the class.) For this reason, it is (or so argued Lask) difficult for us to even conceive of ways of arranging form and content that do not "conflate predication and form. Yet we still recognize that speech can have a perlocutionary effect (which is, presumably, the whole reason we do it) without assuming the form of the form, without, that is, having a predicate. "An Idea, a Form, a Being / Which left the azure sky and fell / Into a leaden, miry Styx / That no eye in Heaven can pierce..." wrote Baudelaire (translated by William Aggeler). Without a proper *copula* to establish a subject and a predicate, the *stanza* still can affect us.

Baecker argues that with Spencer-Brown, we may be able to transcend the limits of Aristotelian logic, and allow for ambiguity and paradox. But perhaps ambiguity and paradox come from the imposition of the form of the form (that is, of the assertions-form), and that this is not the only way of finding order in our thoughts. After all, Spencer-Brown's conception is fundamentally tied to Boolean algebra, with two states, and to the copula of identity. This is indeed a way of connecting – to connect by judging two things equal ($A = B$), to connect by juxtaposing (A / B). Certainly there is always ambiguity because of the falseness of any incomplete predication, for if, as Hegel (and Schelling) assumed, *B does not exhaust the potential of A*, if *B does not do justice to A*, then *A is also not B*. But I believe that Lask – and Peirce – suggest something else. *A and B* may have a different relation, one established in the physical nature of the universe, one that is not blankly awaiting construction via the form of the form. This is what Bruno believed – that there was a world soul; perhaps, in poetic words, "An Idea, a Form, a Being / Which left the azure sky and fell / Into a leaden, miry Styx / That no eye in Heaven can Peirce..."



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