Editorial: French Thought in Dialogue

Volume 9.2 of *Culture and Dialogue* is devoted to the topic of “French Thought in Dialogue.” Of course, “thought” is not necessarily confined to “philosophy” understood in the narrow sense of thinking method pursued with greater or lesser degree of scientific rigour or imaginative insight, and whose origins could be traced back to Ancient Greece as much as the Enlightenment as far as the Western world is concerned. Yet, the “thought” at stake does not mean *any* thought. It certainly comprises philosophy in the common sense of the word, including as suggested above, but it also spans the thinking practices found in the works of theologians, historians, political and legal theorists, sociologists, anthropologists, scientists, literary figures, artists and so on. The question, then, is on which ground we can identify a mode of thought that is specifically French – and the same applies to any practice or tradition. The language is obviously a determinant factor, but not only. As the risk of falling into the nebula of essentialism, one can safely assert that there are elements of French thought in Lalan (Xie Jing-lan), Samuel Beckett, Fujishima Takeji, or even Milan Kundera. The geography, environment, or milieu plays a role, albeit less and less significant at the time of digital technology and virtual reproduction. The epoch plays a part in defining the alleged origin as well as the mutation of French thought from, among others, medieval thinkers to reformers and dissidents, sceptics and scholastics, spiritualists and enlightened thinkers, deists, materialists and atheists; romanticists, eclecticists and positivists, Catholic thinkers and existentialists, Marxists and humanists, structuralists and phenomenologists, as well as deconstructionists, psychoanalysts and feminists – all contributed to fashion that sublime idea of French thought through a variety of styles, forms, methods, topics, and ideologies, whether through the lens of institutional clarity or in the *esprit révolutionnaire*. Yet, if French thought may not always be francophone, did not always develop on the soil of France, has mutated throughout time, and is multifarious, then, what is French thought?

In effect, the question applies to all identities, whether understood in terms of sublimity, essence or even noumenon. In reply, François Jullien tells us *Il n’y a pas d’identité culturelle*. There is indeed no such a thing as French thought in itself. Still, Jullien’s statement betrays a dramatic contradiction. The adverbial pronoun “y” indicates an emplacement, that which precisely allows whatever

identity to determine itself. *L'identité ne peut qu'y éclore* – but not at the cost of what makes identity possible, its relational nature, that transformative movement at the source of what makes us noticing the emergence of some-thing; a creativity whose very nature depends on the enacted relation to the place of its occurrence, a dynamic of empty and full that brings identity and its place into a circular reciprocity without circumference – the quintessence of the dialogue. The movement itself is of course ungraspable; an absolute emptying, which, far from being a *nécessité de l'autruche*, owes its plausibility to that to which it relates and makes it possible, that is, forms, figures or ideas, or any identifiable entities.

At some point in the course of history a particular cultural intensity began to be noticed to the effect that it started to bear the name of “French thought.” The denomination travelled across centuries, not because of an alleged essential, immortal nature, but precisely because it has constructed itself through that relational dynamic. This assumes a reciprocity and therefore balance between identity formation and its places to prevent the relational movement from becoming overpowering or annihilating. Globalisation, no doubt, is creating such an asymmetry against which the worst of reactions may be expected, and this includes French thought.

In « *La nouvelle image de l'homme dans la philosophie franco-allemande du XVII^e à la fin du XX^e siècle* », Françoise Dastur confirms the dialogical nature of identity-formation by showing how French philosophy went through a process of transformation that started in the seventeenth century within a certain historical context and subsequently developed through encounters with German philosophy to take a particular shape and acquire a specific texture throughout the twentieth century. In “A Century of Dialogue Around Émile Durkheim as a Founding Father of the Social Sciences,” Wim van Binsbergen equally offers an example of the processes of thought-formation by tracing how Émile Durkheim’s work unfolded to become an “exponent of French thought.” Man-to Tang offers a dialogical response to Jean-Luc Marion’s question concerning the nature of the visible and the invisible in Chinese painting. Jill Drouillard engages in a critical discussion of the “French reproductive policy debate” and in particular Sylviane Agacinski’s rhetoric of “sexual difference” seen as a defining foundation of French society. Joshua M. Hall reflects on different levels of dialogue from Michel Henry’s own interview “Art and Phenomenology” to subsequently propose new phenomenological interpretations of literal and figurative dances. In “Covid-19 Viral Logics, Social Inequality and Hegemonic Mimicry,” Wisam Kh. Abdul-Jabbar draws from Michel Serres’ “notion of the parasite” to deconstruct the theatre of human responses to the pandemic in order to disclose “parasitic behaviors” and “social inequalities.” Conor Barry

brings Michel Foucault and Noam Chomsky into dialogue on “grammar and governmentality” to bring out similarities and differences as well as contrasts and mutual influences between the two thinkers. Finally, Robert Clarke in his book review invites us to discover (or rediscover) the work of Édouard Glissant through the lens of Alexandre Leupin’s study *Édouard Glissant, Philosopher: Heraclitus and Hegel in the Whole-World*. In all these instances, French thought is shown to emerge within the place of the dialogue, through that relational movement of emptying reciprocity so vital to the expression of the fulness of things. *Il y a donc bien une pensée française* – for the time being.

I would like to thank the authors as well as my editorial colleagues, board members and anonymous reviewers who have made the publication of this issue possible in spite of the unavoidable delays due to the situation caused by the pandemic. I would also like to welcome Kaitlin A. Sager, of Tulane University, who generously accepted to join our editorial team as Manuscript Editor. And many thanks as well to Erika Mandarino for her contribution during her time working with us as part of our editorial team.

The next issue will in many ways be distinctive as it will mark the first fold of Volume 10 (2022). Issue 10.1 will focus on “The Arts and Cultures of the Dialogue.”

Gerald Cipriani