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Introduction: Style, Mode, and Manner

Western philosophy and common sense have long rested on an assumption conveyed quite spontaneously by a language based on a propositional form that combines subject and predicate: there are self-standing, discrete entities or substances (subjects), to which properties, modes, or relations (predicates) are inherent, which remain mostly accidental to them. The substance, which exists independently of its accidents, modes, and relations, is the main name of being. Of course, this approach did not remain without consequences in fields such as epistemology and aesthetics, which largely settled on a “monostylistic” form of thought, in which epistemic and aesthetic styles remained subordinate to the univocity of their object.

Twentieth-century philosophy gave a fundamental impetus to the development of contemporary logic and metaphysics by showing how deeply the philosophical tradition begun by Aristotle depended on this grammatical form¹. While the self-sufficient existence of independent substances has long been disputed, thanks in part to the philosophical development of the concept of relation in the 20th century², it seems that another aspect of the question is just slowly beginning to emerge. This other aspect can be focalized through three concepts, partly overlapping but based on different assumptions and harbingers of different implications, around which this issue revolves: style, mode, manner.

In recent years, from many directions, a movement has begun to advance that could be called “modal revolution”³, which finds in these three concepts the banners that allow it to crack the stability of the monostylistic, univocal kind of thought that, despite the claim that “being is said in many ways”, followed Aristotelian substantialism. For a long time, the

¹ B. Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1900.

² C. Frigerio, *Ricomporre un cosmo in frammenti: Il dibattito sulle relazioni interne ed esterne*, Mimesis, Milano 2023.

³ G. Bottirolì, *La ragione flessibile: modi d'essere e stili di pensiero*, Mimesis, Milano 2013.

“modal” aspect of philosophy was limited to logic: at most, it was a matter of admitting different “modes of judgment” that affected being only in an extrinsic way⁴; following Kant’s definition, many have considered modalities as extrinsic predicates that “do not augment” their subject. On the contrary, the idea underlying the modal revolution is that there is no paramount or univocal being capable of many different interpretations: rather, the nuances of being are the things themselves. There is a substantiality to ontological halos and fringes; an ontology can be made to revolve around styles and manners. Vladimir Jankélévitch prefigured this when he noted that “the rehabilitation of accidents characterizes a certain modal philosophy that disregards being in order to consider only the ways of being of this being: philosophy reintegrates the cave of shadows and reflections from which it had freed the prisoners”⁵. But it’s not just a question of rehabilitating accidents. If the modal revolution were to succeed, it would result in a transformed cosmos, a world – as Sjoerd van Tuinen explains – “in which substance revolves around modes instead of vice versa”⁶. Whereas “classical philosophy makes a strict distinction between subject and predicate or substance and property”, a philosophy centered on styles, modes and manners puts “both terms in variation, such that predication becomes a matter of folding”⁷. At that point, in the words of Giorgio Agamben, every being would be grasped in terms of its *maniera sorgiva*:

not a being that is *in* this or that mode, but a being that is *its* mode of being, and thus, while remaining singular and not indifferent, is multiple and valid for all... The being that does not remain below itself, that does not *presuppose* itself as a hidden essence that chance or destiny would then condemn to the torment of qualifications, but rather *exposes* itself in its qualifications, *is* its *thus* without remainder – such a being is neither accidental nor necessary, but is, so to speak, *continually engendered from its own manner*.⁸

At once singular, multiple, and valid for all. Agamben’s insight may prove important in order to grasp that, in order to refocus our think-

⁴ N. Hartmann, *Possibility and Actuality*, trans. S.A. Scott and A. Adair, De Gruyter, Berlin 2013. See G. Agamben, *L’uso dei corpi*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2014, p. 210: “the concept of mode... entails an ambiguity, so that in the history of Western philosophy it presents itself sometimes as a logical concept (we prefer to speak of ‘modality’ and modal logic), sometimes as an ontological concept”.

⁵ V. Jankélévitch, *Le je-ne-sais-quoi et le presque-rien*, PUF, Paris 1957, p. 3.

⁶ S. van Tuinen, *The Philosophy of Mannerism: From Aesthetics to Modal Metaphysics*, Bloomsbury, London 2022, p. 15.

⁷ Ivi, p. 78.

⁸ G. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt, Minnesota UP, Minneapolis 2007, p. 27.

ing around style, mode, and manner, we need to stop opposing particular and universal, form and content, intuition and concept, and instead grasp and conceptualize the *continuous variation* that involves both form and content, and from which form and content are produced as two divergent precipitates. It may not be a coincidence that one of the first to focus on this set of concepts was the father of morphology, J.W. Goethe: unlike “imitation of nature”, the artistic process that simply copies details, Goethe sees “manner” as the grasping of what is universal (precisely, form conceived as incessant variation) in every detail, while he describes “style” as the definitive synthesis between subjective manner and objective variation, which attunes the variation of the artistic trait to that of things themselves⁹.

This issue seeks to explore this possibility of grasping variation for itself. It is not enough to claim, with Jankélévitch, that “manner is the category of that which is outside categories”¹⁰. The idea that underlies this issue is that style, mode, and manner can become objects of philosophical inquiry in their own right, that they can become the object of a renewed “first philosophy”. If these statements prove to be true, the problem will become one of determining *under what conditions* it is possible to constitute a pure concept of the difference of entities.

If we follow Goethe, **style** is the most “profound” of the three concepts, the one whose pure concept is closest to the “virtual” from which actualization takes place¹¹. Style is not generic but *genetic*, singular-universal. It is certainly possible to conceive of style as the historical codification of a way of expressing reality. But thinking of it solely in this way would mean losing sight of its creative – and therefore generative – component. Style is not merely the historical stabilization of a form, but also a logical trigger that enables a form (logical, poetic, political) to generate a sense to come. In this way, the problem of style is above all a problem of signification, of the genesis of meaning and signifiers, and thus of the continuous variation of sense. It is precisely the midpoint – almost an event – between stable form and mutant forms, between codes of expression and the creation of expressibility to come. Gilles Deleuze, for example, distinguished (codified) style from non-style (not yet codified) in relation to Proust’s *Recherche*.¹² But it is clear that this concerns not merely a mode of writing or an artistic composition, but

⁹ J.W. Goethe, *Einfache Nachahmung der Natur, Manier, Styl*, in M. Bell (ed.), *The Essential Goethe*, Princeton UP, New Haven 2016, pp. 875-78.

¹⁰ V. Jankélévitch, *Le je-ne-sais-quoi et le presque-rien*, 2: *La méconnaissance, le malentendu*, Seuil, Paris 1980, p. 30.

¹¹ A.F. de Donato, *Eterogenesi del concetto. Variazioni su matematica e stile a partire da Gilles Deleuze*, Orthotes, Napoli, 2026.

¹² G. Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. R. Howard, Minnesota UP, Minneapolis 2004.

the way in which it is possible to compose entire visions of the world, in their concreteness. Style is always a feature of human works, as Gilles-Gaston Granger argues¹³; it is therefore a matter of the very constitution of the world.

This special issue of *Scenari* begins with the article by **Matteo Vagelli**, which studies “stylistic pluralism” at the intersection of epistemology and aesthetics, placing it at a more fundamental level than any “theoretical pluralism,” the pluralism of theories that takes these theories in their already realized state rather than observing their genesis from a singular style of thought. Style also eludes Kant’s alternative between the sensible and the intelligible: not belonging to the realm of form or content, but rather rooted in the junction where these two poles diverge, the investigation of style allows us to grasp how a concept can be perceived, enabling, as **Domenico Licciardi** demonstrates, a reorganization of the entire field of aesthetics.

Obviously, no investigation of the concept of style as such can avoid considering specific case studies. Indeed, the variety of subjects covered by a study focusing on this concept demonstrates the heuristic potential of this approach: while **Andrea F. de Donato** studies the “potency of style” in Demetrius’ *Peri Hermeneias*, which anticipates considerations on stylistic pluralism by showing the impossibility of reducing style to a single consideration, **Giacomo Pezzano** moves forward two thousand years, studying the styles of philosophical discourse in digital format, and in particular turning to YouTube as a medium characterized by a distinctive philosophical style.

Unlike the genetic approach to style, **manner** seems to refer to something like a plane of immanence on which an infinity of possible variations occur, holding together plurality and underlying unity, and indeed making the incessant creation of diversity the very nature of the common fabric of the world. Sjoerd van Tuinen has provided the most accomplished attempt to lay the foundations for a mannerist philosophy to date, but the first outline is probably due to G.W. Leibniz, who wrote in the *New Essays on Human Understanding*:

The kinds [*manières*] and degrees of perfection vary up to infinity, but... the foundations [*le fond*] are everywhere the same; this is a fundamental maxim for me, which governs my whole philosophy. But if this philosophy is the simplest in resources it is also the richest in kinds [*la plus riche dans les manières*], because nature can vary these infinitely... with the greatest imaginable abundance, order and adornment.¹⁴

¹³ G.-G. Granger, *Essai d'une philosophie du style*, Odile Jacob, Paris 1988.

¹⁴ Quoted in S. van Tuinen, *The Philosophy of Mannerism*, cit., p. 80.

It is curious that the person who took the Aristotelian subject-predicate form to the extreme was also one of the greatest conceptualizers of manner, but in his study of Leibniz's thought, Gilles Deleuze has aptly noted how "no philosophy has ever pushed to such an extreme the affirmation of a one and same world, and of an infinite difference or variety in this world", keeping together two seemingly contradictory principles: "Everything is always the same thing. There is only one and the same Basis; and: Everything is distinguished by degree. Everything differs by manner"¹⁵.

Although Mannerism, Baroque, and Rococo are not entirely interchangeable, it is around this philosophical-aesthetic constellation, rooted in the seventeenth century but whose insights are now the subject of a growing rediscovery, that the second conceptual core of this issue revolves. **Bennett Gilbert** lays the foundations for nothing less than a "rococo ontology", in which fundamental concepts of this artistic movement, such as *rocaille* and atectonicity, become the fulcrums for rethinking an anti-materialistic way of philosophizing centered on a model of subjectivity and continuous creation that is decidedly different from the Cartesian one. **Claudio D'Aurizio's** article is also rooted in aesthetics but extends to considerations of an ontological nature, this time starting precisely from Gilles Deleuze and the connection he managed to establish between his conceptualization of painting and his reading of Spinoza, which over the years shifted increasingly from an interpretation based on the univocity of being to an authentically mannerist reading.

Once again, a "pure" investigation of the concept of manner is inseparable from the discussion of more specific and even concrete issues. Drawing on the theories of Giorgio Agamben, **Minna Hagman** shows how conscious and excessive adherence to one's own way of being results in a sense of comedy, proposing an entirely modal version of the theory of comedy. **Camilla Zani**, on the other hand, turns to Bruno Latour, a thinker whom we will discuss shortly but who is rarely associated with the idea of mannerism, proposing in particular that a mannerist reinterpretation could resolve some of the anthropological and political (in brief, "diplomatic") problems sometimes diagnosed in Latour's works.

A further line of inquiry that emerges from some of the contributions collected in this issue (e.g. Hagman's article), although it is not explicitly developed, concerns the possibility of understanding style and manner also as distinct configurations of **aesthetic habit**. In this sense, style may name a plastic and situationally responsive habit of expression, while manner may indicate the more repetitive stabilization

¹⁵ G. Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley, Minnesota UP, Minneapolis 1992, p. 58.

of codified expressive patterns. Such a perspective makes it possible to read the relation between style and manner not simply in terms of the opposition between creativity and repetition, but as an internal articulation of habit itself¹⁶. This hypothesis may provide a useful way of connecting some of the ideas proposed in this issue with a line of research that deserves further development.

The final conceptual core of the volume is precisely that of **mode**, a concept to whose popularity Latour, with *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2012), made a decisive contribution¹⁷. If style captures the process of actualization of entities, and manner considers their continuous variation on a flat plane of immanence, mode looks at being already fragmented, at an existence whose modes come before any univocal being, and at the problem of bringing them back together in a single ontology. A.N. Whitehead once claimed that “the task of philosophy is the understanding of the interfusion of modes of existence”¹⁸; in a wonderful, little-known book, Herbert Schneider went so far as to write that “if there are no modes of being, there would be little use for ontology”¹⁹.

The reorientation of ontology from being as such to the very concept of modes of existence seems to be one of the major issues at stake in contemporary metaphysics²⁰. A particularly important author in this regard, rediscovered by Latour himself together with Isabelle Stengers, was Étienne Souriau, whose *The Different Modes of Existence* (1943) was a crucial text for raising the issue of the pluralism of modes of existence that is at the center of the debate today²¹. Two articles demonstrate the relevance of Souriau’s thinking to the modal revolution: **Filippo Domenicali** provides an overview of the 1943 book, showing in particular how, rather than proposing a closed “system” of modes of existence, Souriau set out to establish a pluralist “meta-ontology” that left room for different accounts of the plural composition of the world;

¹⁶ See A. Bertinetto, *Habits, Aesthetics and Normativity*, in “Aisthesis” 17(1) 2024, pp. 247-263; Id., *Aesthetic Habits in Performing Arts*, in “Philosophies” 10(11)/11 2025; A. Bertinetto, J. Frascaroli, *The Pleasure of Habituation: Aesthetic Appreciation Between Familiarity and Novelty* (Unpublished manuscript submitted to *The British Journal of Aesthetics*).

¹⁷ B. Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, trans. C. Porter, Harvard UP, Cambridge 2013.

¹⁸ A.N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, Macmillan, New York 1938, p. 97.

¹⁹ H. Schneider, *Ways of Being: Elements of Analytic Ontology*, Columbia UP, New York 1962, p. 12.

²⁰ C. Frigerio, *Existential Ontology: Towards a First Philosophy of Modes of Existence*, in “Cosmos and History”, 20(1), 2024, pp. 96-132.

²¹ É. Souriau, *The Different Modes of Existence*, trans. Erik Beranek and Tim Howles, Univocal, Minneapolis 2015.

Christian Frigerio focuses on a more specific aspect, which however, through Souriau, also shows how a form of pluralism of modes of existence could be traced back to Spinoza, who is usually considered one of the champions of the univocity of being, and indeed how Souriau's existential pluralism can be framed as the result of a slight modification of the system of the *Ethics*.

The last two articles extend the theme of modes of existence in a critical direction. **Sjoerd van Tuinen** provides a theoretical explanation of why the modes of existence with which the modal revolution is concerned are completely irreducible to the modalities that have been so popular in philosophy (especially analytical philosophy), which are simply a "logicized" version of modes that must instead maintain a fully ontological scope. Finally, **Giovanni Bottirolì** reopens the discussion by emphasizing that modes cannot be reduced to the alternative between the one and the many, in which a "rigid" way of thinking would like to enclose them, but must instead be conceived according to a "flexible" modal pluralism in which the fragmentation of modes reopens to the genetic continuity of styles.