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Logical Modalities and Modes of Existence

Modes of Existence

The notion of mode of existence has recently experienced a great diffusion in the critical humanities and social sciences associated with the “ontological turn”, such as science and technology studies or multinaturalist anthropology. However, not much attention has been paid to the concept of mode of existence itself. By way of Étienne Souriau’s *The Different Modes of Existence* (1943), the aim here is to make some forays into a relatively new branch of modal metaphysics, or rather modal ontology, that seeks to clarify and develop the use of such a concept – a project that contributes to what I call “continental modal metaphysics”.

Following Leibniz and Hegel, continental modal metaphysics focuses on real potentiality (modes of existence) rather than formal possibility (or the merely logical modalities of possibility, contingency, necessity). Contrary to these ancestors, however, it reverses the traditional prioritization of actuality over potentiality. Accordingly, philosophers such as Heidegger, Adorno or Deleuze seek an understanding of potentiality not as deficient and indeterminate vis-à-vis actuality but as something positive and inexhaustible within the actual. What is at issue for them is the ontological difference of the possible within the actual rather than the derivation of its identity from actuality. Their critical gestures all converge on the reactivation of this difference in order to problematize the metaphysical and political tendencies towards its neutralization¹.

However, we must be aware of overgeneralization – not only in terms of the vastly interpretations of possibility among these philosophers, but first of all in terms of a notion of possibility that remains too abstract. After all, the mode of existence, or potentiality, of a revolution is not quite the same as that of, say a god or a commodity or a digital object. To put it in classical terms, what is at stake is the singularity of existences.

¹ See S. van Tuinen, *Continental Modal Metaphysics: From Leibniz to Agamben*, in “Itinerari” (forthcoming).

For perhaps the most sophisticated account of the autonomy and difference of modes vis-à-vis the actual, one can turn to Souriau, that *doctor subtilis* of the 20th century. Inspired by Bergson's reversal of the Aristotelian apparatus of the possible and the real, Souriau objects against essentialist and actualist philosophies that the categories of the possible, the potential, the ready-to-emerge are set "beside the actual, the real, and seen through it, as in rear projection", because they presuppose what they modalize². Instead, he proposes an ontological pluralism with special advocacy for the "virtual" modes of existence, that is, those possible worlds that make themselves felt without ever being fully present and that for this reason are vulnerable to the reductionist judgment of those who resist the desire for creation and imagination that they incite and require.

Although not an exhaustive account of Souriau's modal metaphysics, I will situate it in five steps. First, I sketch two problems in the dominant form of modal metaphysics, namely analytical modal logic and its Aristotelian antecedents: the problems of the indeterminacy of the possible and its exhaustion by the actual. Second, I argue that the shift in emphasis from identity to difference requires us to revisit what Christian Frigerio has identified as the "ontological tension" in Aristotle between the unity of being-qua-being and the multiplicity of ways of existence. In shifting the emphasis from the former to the latter, thirdly, I follow a lead from Souriau (and Agamben) to Leibniz, who sways between an ontic pluralism, posing a multiplicity of ultimate realities (monads), and an existential pluralism, posing the multiplicity of interrelating modes of existence (striving possibles). Fourth, by tracing Souriau's problematization of the cogito, I unpack his understanding of the concept of mode of existence inasmuch as it revolves around the difference between being and existence, and fifth, I show how it culminates in a theory of transmodal individuation that Souriau calls "surexistence".

The Problems of Indeterminacy and Exhaustion

My main hypothesis is that the requirements of modal logic currently tend to block an adequate development of the ontological approach to the pluralism of modes of existence. This blockage is twofold:

1. *The flattening of existence onto essence*: In analytical philosophy, the modal categories (actual/real, possible, contingent, impossible) are quantifiers of the existence of essence. They are predicated on the primordial logical modality of identity, which means that that of which they are predi-

² É. Souriau, *The Different Modes of Existence*, trans. E. Beranek and T. Howles, Minnesota UP, Minneapolis 2015, p. 112.

cated is not itself modified by them. The amodal mode of existence of essence then tends to be seen as possessing a varying degree of reality on a scale from potency to act: certain things or statements (God, mathematical truths) exist necessarily, others (God's creatures, human thinking) only contingently. Or to put it in the words of Thomas Aquinas: "Each thing is perfect according as it is in act, and imperfect as it is in potency"³. Yet as Nahum Brown has shown, the use of the theological notion of perfection comes at the price of *the problem of modal indeterminacy*: in what way does a possible or imperfect essence exist? Traditionally, the mode of existence of the possible is qualified either by being separate from actuality according to modal priority (the actual stands higher than the possible), or by separating the multiplicity of possibles through the conceptual scaffolding of possible worlds. In Aristotle and most of his Western inheritors, actuality is for the most part prior to potentiality; for the ancient atomists or someone like David Lewis today, each world is actual to itself and possible to all others. Either way, only one world exists, the rest merely subsists. In both cases, the neat separation of possibility and actuality renders mysterious the mode of existence of the possible, or indeed of any essence considered beyond actuality. Either actuality functions as the measure of the other modes, or all modes are just modes of something else, the ontological status of which remains abstract and unclear⁴. The customary obsession with the reality of "fiction" (Meinong, Ingarden), a category already neatly separated from reality, is symptomatic of this indeterminacy more than that it identifies its paradigmatic case.

2. *The flattening of essence onto existence*: The usual way of containing the problem of modal indeterminacy is to conceive of possibility exclusively in the image of what already exists. Aristotle argues that potentiality must exist in one way beyond actuality and in another as actuality. That is to say, while potentiality does exist separately from and in excess of the actual⁵, it only exists for actuality, such that the actual still stands higher than the possible⁶. At stake in this solution to the problem of modal indeterminacy is the relation between essence and becoming. While the Megarians rule out any form of becoming by blocking the actuality of unactualized potentiality, Aristotle does allow for potentiality to remain between the actual and its becoming, but on the condition that its mode of existence is fully covered in terms of the actual. Possibility and

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles. Book One: God*, trans. A.C. Pegis, Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1975, I, 28, 6.

⁴ For a more in-depth discussion of the problem of modal indeterminacy, as well as of a critique of this distinction and separation, see N. Brown, *Hegel on Possibility: Dialectics, Contradiction, and Modality*, Bloomsbury, London 2021.

⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 9.3.

⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 9.8.

contingency are thus conceived of as subordinate terms that are identified, limited, and consummated by the actual, in which essence and existence coincide. This limit is circumscribed by the difference between the accidents encompassed by essence and the contradictories it excludes. Socrates can be young or old, but since he is essentially a rational animal he cannot become irrational or inanimate without ceasing to be Socrates. Following the lineage of Frege-Russell-Quine, in our time this reduction is articulated in an exemplary way in what Jaakko Hintikka has called the “principle of plenitude”, which holds that no possibility remains unfulfilled through an infinity of time and only what is self-contradictory is not realized⁷. From this follows *the problem of modal exhaustion*: the priority of the actual means that the possible is not allowed to really exceed the actual. The very separation of essence and existence is bound to what Giorgio Agamben calls the “ontological apparatus”, in which essence does not rest in itself but only exists to the extent that it is “made to exist”, that is, to the extent that it is fully operationalized⁸. This gravitational necessity of actualization as a prerequisite for considering the possible and the contingent we can call *actualism*, or the metaphysics of presence. It overcomes the problem of modal indeterminacy only by re-binding modal essence to existence and re-presenting the possible in terms of its realization. In this way, potentiality is reduced to a fully given, stable, self-identical, and available thing.

In short, the reductions of existence to essence and of essence to existence to the point of *identity* block an understanding of what existence and its different modes are. They block, firstly, the very notion of a possibility that is real yet remains upstream of actuality (e.g. utopia, faith, hope, anything that has traction as object of a belief in the world’s transformability). In conceiving the relation between essence and existence in terms of a transition from potentiality to actuality, secondly, they also block an understanding of the (potentially infinite) differences qua modes of existence as opposed to the logical identity of the concept of being. What is at stake here, then, is a concept of *modal difference* that actualism tends to block but that in fact holds the key to the relation between essence and existence insofar as it offers an alternative solution to the problem of modal indeterminacy, one that does not need to pass through modal exhaustion. It is the reality of the possible not as essence resembling existence, but as a modification of existence.

⁷ J. Hintikka, *Time and Necessity: Studies in Aristotle’s Theory of Modality*, Oxford UP, Oxford 1973, pp. 93-113.

⁸ G. Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, trans. D. Kishik and S. Pedatella, Stanford UP, Stanford 2009.

Univocity and Equivocity of Being

This ontological difference of the possible within actuality, as opposed to the derivation of its identity at a distance from actuality, is perhaps best understood through a return to the Aristotelean distinction between kinds of being and ways of existence. So far we have criticized the idea of modal categories as quantifications of a being deemed homogenous. The analytical modalities are predicated of a single and same *kind* of being. Of course, there are other types of categories that also make qualitative distinctions between different kinds of being (ontic pluralism). Yet insofar as the possible exists beyond the actual, we must also distinguish different *ways* of existence (existential pluralism)⁹.

Contrary to most of his analytical disciples and despite his demand for a first philosophy addressing being-qua-being (being as self-identity), Aristotle famously defended the equivocity of being: “being is said in many ways”¹⁰. This is generally understood to mean that being cannot be a genus; it is not an ontological category of which the modes are mere particularizations. However, the formulation being-qua-being can be read as not only about being but also about the *qua*¹¹: the mode of existence of being, which does not coincide with ontic self-identity and remains irreducible to it. Although potentiality and actuality can pertain to the same kinds of being, they are themselves different ways of being¹². As Nahum Brown argues, any conversion of potentiality to actuality distorts the quality or style of potential, which has a different moment, solidity and rhythm. There is a “stylistic excess” or rhythmic imbalance of potentiality insofar as it always lags behind or runs ahead of its articulation. “Actuality is too heavy and explicit, and potentiality is too vaporous and subtle, to hold together the precise expression of the one as the other”¹³.

Frigerio has pointed out that there nevertheless remains an “ontological tension”¹⁴ between the identity of being and existential difference in Aristotle, which traditionally tends to get resolved in favor of identity: a reduction, based on a principle of parsimony, of existence to

⁹ I borrow the distinction between ontic pluralism and existential pluralism from Souriau, *The Different Modes of Existence*, 99. In Aristotle, the distinction is between the ten categories of being and the different meanings of being in *Metaphysics* 4 and 5.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1003a32.

¹¹ G. Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, trans. A. Kotsko, Stanford UP, Stanford 2016, p. 172.

¹² C. Witt, *Ways of Being: Potentiality and Actuality in Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Cornell UP, Ithaca 2003.

¹³ N. Brown, *Aristotle and Heidegger: Potentiality in Excess of Actuality*, in “Idealistic Studies” 46(2), 2016, p. 208.

¹⁴ C. Frigerio, *Existential ontology: Towards a First Philosophy of Modes of Existence*, in “Cosmos and History” 20(1), 2024, pp. 96-13.

logical essence and vice versa. This is called *pros hen* equivocity, which relates a diversity of meanings to a focal meaning (for Aristotle, substance as primary referent), thereby making metaphysics as a unified science of being possible¹⁵. As Frigerio shows, this tendency to prioritize the identity of being over equivocity is radicalized in Scotus' demand for the intelligibility of God beyond analogy, i.e. the univocity of being whether this is the being of humans or of God. It returns in Occam's razor, modern scientific claims to the mathematical knowability and availability of being as "nature", the arguments of Quine against Meinong (as well as Husserl/Ingarden), and perhaps we can say that it is one of the defining gestures of skepticism in general. In each case, being is argued to be unitary, quantifiable, and identical with existence. What then remains of existential difference is a series of hierarchic divisions with which we are all too familiar, such as those between univocal being and multifarious appearance, being versus non-being, objective versus subjective, or indeed, essence and existence.

Why Existence is Not a Predicate

The price for the essentialist neutralization of the ontological tension between kinds and ways is the reduction of existence to conceptual demarcations, in relation to which existence can only appear as something accidental. Immanuel Kant, for example, famously argues that existence and modality are not predicates that make any relevant difference to the entity of which they are predicated – there is no substantial or qualitative difference between the concept and existence of a hundred thalers. But this presupposes an extreme idealization, according to which existence is no longer a determination of a thing but a judgment of thought, and the thought of the possible itself is reduced to the concept of its actual accomplishment. "The actual", Kant writes, "contains nothing more than the merely possible. A hundred actual dollars do not contain the least bit more than a hundred possible ones"¹⁶. Only this complete internalization of existence to the homogeneity of the concept allows for its quantitative reproduction. Only then does existence not qualify or alter the concept in any way. But once achieved, the ontological break between the thing and thought, between the existential and the predicative, seems irreparable.

Interestingly, another version of this argument can be found in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who reduces to absurdity the notion of existence

¹⁵ For a critique, see for example K. McDaniel, *The Fragmentation of Being*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2017, pp. 15-17.

¹⁶ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1999, p. 567.

as predicate: “if existence were anything other than what is demanded by essence (*essentiae exigentia*), it would follow that it itself would have a certain essence, or would add something new to things, concerning which it might be asked, whether this essence exists, and why it and not another”¹⁷. In making exigency the defining attribute of possibility (“everything that is possible demands to exist”¹⁸ [*omne possibile exigit existere*]), Leibniz establishes a direct connection between possibility and reality. Necessity is stripped of its otherness to contingency just as being or existence is stripped of its otherness vis-à-vis essence. The point is not yet the Kantian one that existence does not make any qualitative difference to logical essence, but that essence itself, conceived as ontological demand (exigency) rather than as concept, is already a qualitatively and ontologically unique mode of existence, no matter its quantity of reality. Existence is not a predicate because it is contingent. It is contingent not because it doesn’t add anything to essence but because essence holds its own possibility. For if existence were to be one of the essential predicates of the complete concept of individuals (monads), God’s choice to create them would have been redundant, as such individuals would have to exist regardless of God’s choice. Likewise, Leibniz’s central thesis that the actual world is contingent upon God’s choice to create this rather than another possible world would be vacuous, for creation would leave no room for rational deliberation. Of course, the real world wouldn’t exist without God’s creative involvement; still even from this point of view God is more a necessary and decentered condition than an origin of creation. It is because of this noise of the possible in the background of the monads that populate the world, moreover, that monads are ‘inclined but not necessitated’ to actualize one world rather than another. As possible-being, the modal essences that make up a world have their own irreducible tendency to exist.

The thrust of Leibniz’s argument is that existence cannot be contained in the individual beings in which it is actualized and invested. Existence is not a predicate, firstly, because there is no existence in itself. Whatever is, is only insofar as it exists in a particular way: it is always this or that, or better still, “such” or “thus” or “in some respect”. To state that something is something or does not exist means nothing if it is not specified in what way or in what sense. While it makes little sense to say that sinning sins, it is the mode of existence of the sinner that constitutes the real Adam rather than the other way around. Secondly, existence is not a predicate, because suchness is not

¹⁷ G.W. Leibniz, *Dissertatio de principio individui* (1684), A 6.4 1443, see also 762-3. Leibniz here reiterates Thomas Aquinas, who ironically wrote that “just as we cannot say that running runs, so we cannot say that existence exists” (cited in Giorgio Agamben, *What is Philosophy?*, trans.L. Chiesa, Stanford UP, Stanford 2017, p. 30).

¹⁸ G.W. Leibniz, *Die philosophische Schriften*, ed. C.J. Gerhardt, Olms, Berlin 1875-90, VII 194.

simple but composite, open-ended and incomplete – indeed it is indeterminate in a non-exhaustible way. The disjunction of possibles guarantees that they are more than their compossible conjunction in clearly delineated possible world. Their compositional capacity is infinite in principle and exceeds any form of pre-established harmony or necessary relation. God did not create Adam and then the world in which Adam sins; rather, he first chose this particular combination of essences, a consequence of which is the creation of the real Adam, whose existence remains perpetually colored with shades of non-sinching. Both God and created individuals are merely the beings between which the unfolding of possibility occurs, whereas existence is a multiplicity, a pre-predicative field of demands for existence that unfold and refold in infinite differentiation and integration.

Leibniz's existential pluralism opens the path to a non-Heideggerian way of articulating the question of being. Ontological difference is reconceived as existential difference, as a world of many worlds. The central problem of (com)possibility, of the immanent dissonance and resonance of modes of existence, makes it immediately ethical and political, in the sense of what Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers call "cosmopolitics". As their common inspiration Souriau puts it, being comprises an "original anarchy" in which "every being posits itself in proportion to and because of its intrinsic right to be" while also being limited by "cosmic requirements" entailed by their relational and combinatory nature¹⁹. In this ecological context, we encounter a philosophical ethos of adhering to the plenitude of modes of existence, especially those excluded from the economical constraints of perfection.

Being and Existence

Contrary to Kant, for Leibniz essence itself already contains something more than its realization. This leads us back to the ontological tension in Aristotle between the identity and the multivocity of being. Following Frigerio, we must ask: What if the solution to this tension tended towards difference rather than identity? What if there were no such thing as being qua being or bare existence to which a mode would then be added? What if we reconceived of the univocity of being itself in a Deleuzian way, according to which being is univocal but not its concept, such that being is said equally only of modal differences?²⁰ Indeed, what if there are far more modes of existence than just those of potentiality and actuality?

If, in the title of his book *The Different Modes of Existence*, the emphasis is

¹⁹ É. Souriau, *L'Instauration Philosophique*, PUF, Paris 1955, p. 40; *The Different Modes of Existence*, cit., p. 103.

²⁰ G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton, Continuum, London 1994, pp. 36, 304.

on the “different” quality of each mode, it is because, for Souriau, ontological difference means that we should never conflate the ontic and the existential, even if there is a constant coming and going between the two. Modes exist only in and through their ontogenetic effects – they do not exist in their turn. Vice versa, what comes about is not of the same order as the mode, or modes, in which it comes about. A mode of existence does not constitute a reality all by itself; rather, it is a way of realizing something. It is not a mode of determination of substance or being, but a “means of existence, specific conditions of existence, routes traveled or to be traveled in order to obtain access to being, modes of constitutive intentionality”²¹. As such, a mode must not be identified with what is realized. It is a differential that modifies or modulates what becomes actual. Things can become more or less real, but no matter their degree of realization, the modes in which they become won’t come to exist more or less. The latter are all both equally perfect in themselves, insofar as they are not lacking anything, and incomplete insofar as they exist differentially. By contrast, the vacillation between degrees or intensities pertains to real beings. Reality, the ontic, is a matter of presence, while existence, the existential, is a matter of modality²².

In order to explore the practical consequences of the ontological difference between being and existence, as well as the relationality of modes and the metastability of things, we can take our cues from Souriau’s recurrent discussion of the cogito. The initial problem, however, can be formulated by way of one of his most obvious intellectual inheritors, Gilbert Simondon²³. As a propositional relation, the statement “I think, therefore I am” derives from a cutting up of the (“pre-individual”) field of modes existence into separate substances or ontic “terms”: being, thought, and subject. However, if being is first of all relational or virtual, the individual subject’s condition of existence is only relative as a “phase” of existence and therefore richer than unity. Neither being nor the subject can be grasped as pure terms, which is only the way in which thought, itself an individuation that is “not necessarily capable of thinking being in its totality”, substantializes itself in the form of a logical reduction, so as to witness the genesis and justification of itself as a self-contained and autonomous – i.e. fully individuated – mode of existence²⁴. Yet “logical possibility”, as Simondon reminds us, “is only the weakened reflection of the true virtuality”²⁵.

²¹ É. Souriau, *The Different Modes of Existence*, cit., p. 105.

²² Ivi, p. 127.

²³ S. van Tuinen, *Simondon’s Modal Metaphysics*, in R. Mendoza-Canales (ed.), *Individuating Simondon: Between Life and Technology*, Springer, Berlin 2026.

²⁴ G. Simondon, *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*, trans. T. Adkins, Minnesota UP, Minneapolis 2020, vol. 1, p. 362.

²⁵ G. Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. C. Malaspina and J. Rogove, Univocal, Minneapolis 2017, p. 213.

In Simondon, it is precisely the term “mode of existence” that serves as a strategy of philosophical problematization in an “ethics” of “perpetuated individuation”²⁶. The same goes for Souriau. I think, therefore I am? On the contrary. I think but, precisely because of this, I am not an individuated self; I am only on my way to real presence. The reason for this is that the being of the subject is not logical (to be or not to be) but ontological (more or less). I am a thinking being only to the extent that I think and establish myself in this mode of existence²⁷. Even if what Descartes calls “good sense” forbids him to go in this direction, I can also think of my own nothingness. It is this distance between my being and the thought that serves as its evidence that introduces the perplexity of a more real doubt than Descartes allows for: “am I?” Inversely, while the intensity of my presence in thought may vary, this does not affect the activity of thinking itself, which remains a fully self-sufficient and pre-individual mode²⁸. At best, it is therefore as an impersonal power that thought constitutes my personal being. It defines me not clearly and distinctly, i.e. substantially, but in a nascent, penumbral and confused state²⁹.

Souriau’s principle of the “existential incompletion of everything [*toute chose*]” implies not only an infinity of degrees between being and nothingness, it also implies the pluralism of modes. This is because incompletion does not mean imperfect but more than perfect. The virtual is more than the actual. Besides a thinking being and a self, I am also a feeling being, a breathing being, a communal being, a dreaming being, as well as a being that exists in many other, still more minor modes. To each of these modes of existence in turn may correspond other beings and each of these modes presupposes other modes. Different beings correspond with different modes insofar as each mode of existence, when considered in its purity, obtains its own type of being: the thinking thing is not a feeling thing etcetera. Yet the different modes also presuppose other modes insofar as, taken for themselves, thinking, feeling and breathing “are” not substantial or thing-like but relational. Modes do not exist as being-qua-being, but, as Bruno Latour stresses, as being-qua other³⁰. They cannot

²⁶ G. Simondon, *Individuation*, cit., p. 380.

²⁷ C. Frigerio, *The Pluralism of Modes of Existence: Ontology and Genealogy*, PhD dissertation, Università degli Studi di Milano, 2026, p. 49: “The reduction of non-being to being-other, the transformation of what is excluded from being into a source of variation into it, is the common source of all philosophies of modes of existence”.

²⁸ É. Souriau, *The Different Modes of Existence*, cit., pp. 114, 121.

²⁹ For a further, Leibnizian development of this critique of Descartes as well as an account of Souriau’s notion of instauration, see S. van Tuinen, *The Philosophy of Mannerism: From Aesthetics to Modal Metaphysics*, Bloomsbury, London 2022, pp. 63-82 and 105-30.

³⁰ B. Latour, *An Inquiry Into Modes of Existence*, trans. C. Porter, Harvard UP, Cambridge 2013, pp. 62-3: “In order to exist, a being must not only pass by way of another but also in another manner, by exploring other ways, as it were, of altering itself”.

obtain existence or persist in existence except by way of what they are not, and for this reason, the multiple modes always function interactively rather than comparatively. Sometimes I am a bit of a thinking thing while often I am more of a feeling thing (or perhaps even a dead thing). Yet this intensive variation occurs only at the level of my being (or another's), which, in order to exist at all, must consolidate its passages between all sorts of modalities in an intricate existential "architectonic"³¹ (Souriau) or "structure of individuation"³² (Simondon) in which the many different modes support and harmonize each other in radical co-originary.

In sum, the distance between presence and existence means two things: 1) That, instead of one mode of existence or even a single "world" for all beings, things exist in several modes at once and no thing is bound to a single mode. Or to use another of Souriau's examples: Hamlet is a persona in Shakespeare, a presence on stage, a reference in discourse, a hero in a film, and so on. In each mode, Hamlet envelops a different "plane of existence" or material world³³. But from this impurity of beings it also follows 2) that there is no foundational unity or model of being that sustains this plurimodality. Ontic monism is just as little an option as existential monism. Instead, we have an "ontology" of an infinite variety of modes of existence distinguished by the way in which each of them inhabits, and thus selects its distinct form of alterity through, a "network determined by constitutive relations"³⁴. "Hamleticity" is the structuration of the various modes that ingress in it, and as a transmodal structuring it remains open to being subsumed in different figures – to transubstantiation and transformation.

Surexistence

This double pluralism of beings and modes of existence not only defines the richness of a world multiplied by its modes, it also separates a modern or mannerist ontology from a fundamental ontology. This separation can be articulated as the difference between 'manners of *being*' and "*manners of being*"³⁵. Deleuze famously defines the modern as

³¹ É. Souriau, *Avoir une âme. Essai sur les existence virtuelles*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1938, prop. XXII; *The Different Modes of Existence*, cit., pp. 147-8.

³² G. Simondon, *Individuation*, cit., p. 221.

³³ E. Souriau, *The Different Modes of Existence*, cit., p. 130.

³⁴ Ivi, p. 101.

³⁵ As David Lapoujade explains, it is not a matter of reducing the different modes to a common ground (Being) conceived as indeterminate plenitude, but of how the modes take off from that which grounds them, of how they produce being as a fully determined plurality: D. Lapoujade, *The Lesser Existences: Étienne Souriau, an Aesthetics for the Virtual*, trans. E. Beranek, Minnesota UP, Minneapolis 2021, p. 7.

a Copernican revolution in which the modes no longer revolve around substance but substance around the modes³⁶. This means that instead of a substance that is perfect in its unity and imperfect modalities we get a substantiality of modes: an incomplete substance diversified by modes that, in their interaction, produce ever new variations in/of substance itself³⁷. Kant accomplished only half of the revolution when he posited human thought as the condition of the objective world. For what if thought is a *sui generis* mode of existence of which the human subject is only the occasional cause, not unlike the way in which, according to Simondon, humans are the combustion engine's instrument for the emergence of the mode of existence of the carburetor? Modes found things not in their functioning but in their genesis, which in turn is almost always the result of a passage between two or several modes. Instead of a synthesis that remains conditional on a subject that remains unaffected by it, modality thus becomes the basic building block of a superdiverse world populated not with subjects and objects but with those existential achievements perhaps best called "events": mutual appropriations or reciprocal causalities of possibilities that endlessly combine, separate, support, endure, overlap, transfer, and fuse into one another – for example, in the resonant form of a revolution.

The consequences of this Copernican revolution are immense. If there lies no ultimate identity at the basis of the different modes of existence, then there is no external plane of reference or ideal existence with respect to which this or that existence would be more or less perfect, more or less strong. For Descartes, I am a thing that thinks, to the extent that I imperfectly resemble God's infinite intelligence. This shows how much he was still a man of the Renaissance. Existence is measured against the transcendent being of God in terms of finite degrees. In a truly modern ontology, by contrast, the self can be a bit of a thinking thing and a bit of a feeling or breathing thing, and remain a work in progress all the while not lacking in any way. In the absence of a unified model, the challenge is to conceive of these modes not as all revolving around the same substantial subject, but to conceive of the subject itself as itself revolving around its modes of substantiation. It is only by expanding our horizon

³⁶ G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, cit., pp. 40-1.

³⁷ See also A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs 1979, p. 7: "The philosophy of organism is closely allied to Spinoza's scheme of thought. But it differs by the abandonment of the subject-predicate forms of thought, so far as concerns the presupposition that this form is a direct embodiment of the most ultimate characterization of fact. The result is that the 'substance-quality' concept is avoided; and that morphological description is replaced by description of dynamic process. Also Spinoza's 'modes' now become the sheer actualities; so that, though analysis of them increases our understanding, it does not lead us to the discovery of any higher grade of reality".

of compossible attachments and by taking care of the interplay at work between them that we can fully concretize our potentials. The precarious mode of existence of the cogito must therefore be rethought as a “surexistential” drama³⁸.

The key to this is to insist that modes are not models. While the convergence of modes appears to result in a mode of existence of the second degree, what Souriau calls the “purism” of the modes of the first degree does not disprove the novelty of this convergence³⁹. On the contrary, modal mutation and recombination is what defines the passage from possible to compossible, making transmodal passage an inherent condition of reality. I think, feel, breathe, and so on, and it is only through the singular way of transmodal intersection that my being is individuated (or not) and distinguished from yours. Things generally come about as surexistential unifications: individuations of a positivity that “surpasses” and “adjoins” the diversity of the modes “without, however, subverting or annihilating their specific existences”⁴⁰. Insofar as their unique combination refers to nothing but itself, the various intrinsic strengths and weaknesses of the self qua thinking, feeling, and breathing co-invent an irreducibly new mode of existence. They

are no longer strengths and weakness of existence, they are existing strengths or weaknesses, and are so at the interior of an existence, which they accomplish or perfect for what it is. As integral or analysable elements of this existence, they [the different modes of existence] do not divide existence, which only results from their assemblage in a single presence.⁴¹

Zigzagging between becoming and being – or what comes down to the same, between the many and the one – individuation is an event that posits itself. A new-born is the object of love not because of some insipid generality or because of a particular property, but because of the growing charm or strength with which it integrates its modes beyond the referential planes they define by themselves.⁴² More than just a summation or ontic combination of existential specifications into a substance, a surexistence accomplishes a ‘synapsis’ among modes, some more achieved than oth-

³⁸ On Souriau’s Leibnizianism and the instauration of subjectivity, see S. van Tuinen, *The Use of Souls: Souriau and Political Spirituality*, in “*Aisthesis*” 15(2), 2022, pp. 103-113.

³⁹ É. Souriau, *The Different Modes of Existence*, pp. 130, 187-90.

⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 190.

⁴¹ Ivi, p. 125.

⁴² Cf. Agamben’s discussion of the *quodlibet ens*, the coming being, as the whatever being, meaning not exactly “being, little matter which” but “being, which matters in every way”: G. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. M. Hardt, Minnesota UP, Minneapolis 2007, p. 1.

ers, interior to its own being. Considered for themselves, every mode is of 'equal dignity' and contains its 'indubitable and sui generis' haecceity (or 'pauity,' as Souriau calls it). Yet the very existence of intensive variation attests to the inexhaustible variety of the modes of individuation, and to the eventual indiscernibility of first and second degree.⁴³ Insofar as it marks the really existing sedimentation of a variety of modes of existence in convergence with that of thought, and despite all its subjectivist inheritances, even the cogito contains the undispersed positivity of a surexistence that surpasses the modes that it brings together: 'The Cogito is not only proof of the existence of the self and of thought, it is an event that declares itself through itself and bursts forth like shattering glass.'⁴⁴

At the same time, the distinction between presence and existence does not disappear with that between first and second degree. For the new understanding of the cogito as an event or surexistence rather than as subjective experience implies that nothing actually guarantees that this event takes place or endures. The being of the cogito is 'work to-be-made.' For something to exist, for a transmodal passage to be successful and for being to be 'conquered,' it takes the work (*oeuvre*, *opera*) of what Souriau refers to as 'instauration.'⁴⁵ There is no creative accomplishment that does not involve work and conquest, as well as the risks of failure. As emphasized by Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour, it is this pervasive sense of the existential fragility of things that sets Souriau – but the same could be said of modal pluralism or Continental modal metaphysics in general – apart from all kinds of actualism⁴⁶.

Conclusion

The concept of mode was created first of all in order to make sense of the relationship between essence and existence. Here lie the common

⁴³ É. Souriau, *The Different Modes of Existence*, cit., p. 131.

⁴⁴ Ivi, pp. 172-73, 114-18. Cf. Deleuze on the Cartesian cogito and its plane of immanence as example of philosophical creation: G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchill, Verso, London 1994, pp. 25-7.

⁴⁵ Souriau also speaks of "anaphoric variation", but it is not entirely clear if he refers to repetition in rhetorics or the prayer through which the bread and wine are consecrated in Christian liturgy. Instauration refers to "every process, abstract or concrete, of creative, constructive, ordering, evolutive operations, that brings to the position of a being in its pauity, that is to say, with a sufficient glow of reality" (Souriau, *L'Instauration Philosophique*, cit., p. 10n).

⁴⁶ See their introduction to Souriau, *The Different Modes of Existence*, cit., pp. 11-87. Or as Christian Frigerio puts it: "A 'robust sense of reality beyond the actual' must also be an oxymoronic *robust* sense of the *fragility* of things" (C. Frigerio, *The Pluralism of Modes of Existence*, cit., p. 125).

roots of both the notion of mode of existence and traditional modalities, even if the latter are traditionally associated with the categories of judgment and the former with creative work. Both notions are expressions of the demand that ontology is repopulated with beings excluded by a strictly actualist or identitarian approach. Yet this doesn't alleviate their differences. The key difference is that possibility, no matter whether we conceive of it as logical category or real potentiality, is a too limited and limiting way of giving non-actual beings full consideration. Essence itself must now be reconsidered in excess over any form of identity. Modality is not extrinsic but intrinsic to essence yet independent of any selfsame object. In order to jam the ontological apparatus, we must modalize the relation itself between potential and actual. What passes from potential to actual is not an essence mirroring existence to varying degrees of perfection, but the modality or sense in which existence, inherently incomplete, alters itself: a possible world, or surexistence, in the making. Modal essences are like attractors in dynamic systems. They are contemporary with processes of realization and in no way precede them. Since modes are not quantities of essence-existence but mutant potentialities, moreover, quantity can tip over into quality as much as the other way around. Perhaps there is no limit to the number of modes of existence. Instead of the four logical modalities of being, or the Aristotelian categories of being and ways of existence including those of potentiality and actuality, or the Heideggerian difference between being and beings, there are just as many modes of existence as there are possible becomings.

Modalità logiche e modi di esistenza

Il concetto di «modo di esistenza» ha recentemente conosciuto una grande diffusione nelle discipline critiche delle scienze umane e sociali legate alla «svolta ontologica», quali gli studi su scienza e tecnologia o l'antropologia multinaturalista. Tuttavia, non è stata prestata molta attenzione al concetto stesso di «modo di esistenza». Ispirandomi all'opera di Souriau *I differenti modi di esistenza*, l'obiettivo è quello di compiere alcune incursioni in un ramo relativamente nuovo della metafisica modale, o meglio dell'ontologia modale, che cerca di chiarire e sviluppare l'uso di tale concetto – un progetto che contribuisce a quella che chiamo «metafisica modale continentale». In primo luogo, abbozzo due problemi nella forma dominante della metafisica modale, vale a dire la logica modale analitica e i suoi antecedenti aristotelici: i problemi dell'indeterminatezza del possibile e del suo esaurimento nell'attuale. In secondo luogo, sostengo che lo spostamento dell'enfasi dall'identità alla differenza ci impone di riesaminare la tensione ontologica in Aristotele tra l'unità dell'essere in quanto essere e la molteplicità dei modi di esistenza. Spostando l'enfasi dalla prima alla seconda, in terzo luogo, seguo un suggerimento di Leibniz, che oscilla tra un pluralismo ontico, che postula una molteplicità di realtà ultime (monadi), e un pluralismo esistenziale, che postula la molteplicità di modi di esistenza interrelati (possibili in divenire). In quarto luogo, ripercorrendo la problematizzazione del cogito da parte di Souriau, analizzo la sua comprensione del concetto di modo di esistenza nella misura in cui ruota attorno alla differenza tra essere ed esistenza, e in quinto luogo, mostro come essa culmini in una teoria dell'individuazione transmodale che Souriau chiama «sovraesistenza».

PAROLE CHIAVE: metafisica modale continentale, Étienne Souriau, equivocità dell'essere, essere ed esistenza, cogito

Logical Modalities and Modes of Existence

The notion of mode of existence has recently experienced a great diffusion in the critical humanities and social sciences associated with the 'ontological turn', such as science and technology studies or multinaturalist anthropology. However, not much attention has been paid to the concept of mode of existence itself. By way of Souriau's *The Different Modes of Existence*, the aim here is to make some forays into a relatively new branch of modal metaphysics, or rather modal ontology, that seeks to clarify and develop the use of such a concept – a project that contributes to what I call 'continental modal metaphysics.' First, I sketch

two problems in the dominant form of modal metaphysics, namely analytical modal logic and its Aristotelian antecedents: the problems of the indeterminacy of the possible and its exhaustion by the actual. Second, I argue that the shift in emphasis from identity to difference requires us to revisit the ontological tension in Aristotle between the unity of being-qua-being and the multiplicity of ways of existence. In shifting the emphasis from the former to the latter, thirdly, I follow a lead from Leibniz, who sways between an ontic pluralism, posing a multiplicity of ultimate realities (monads), and an existential pluralism, posing the multiplicity of interrelating modes of existence (striving possibles). Fourth, by tracing Souriau's problematization of the cogito, I unpack his understanding of the concept of mode of existence inasmuch as it revolves around the difference between being and existence, and fifth, I show how it culminates in a theory of transmodal individuation that Souriau calls "surexistence".

KEYWORDS: continental modal metaphysics, Étienne Souriau, equivocity of being, being and existence, cogito