

ETIENNE SOURIAU'S COSMIC VISION AND THE COMING-INTO-ITS-OWN OF THE PLATONIC OTHER

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The death of the French philosopher/ethetician Etienne Souriau in November 1979 has aroused little emotion in the intellectual world, in France or abroad. One might say that contemporary French philosophers are far too taken up with decentralization, deconstruction and the ontic nihilism of post-structuralist game-playing and closed-circuit systems, to find time to look into Souriau's seemingly "quaint" undertaking: the rehabilitation of a knowledge rooted in being. But, to be fair, one has to add that, long before Derrida and Foucault's time, Souriau was already a lonely thinker. Souriau has always been a lonely thinker. For more than half a century, through his books (thirteen in all¹) and countless articles, he has made his meditation available to his peers, and yet, never quite made it into the philosophical arena. He suffered from this lack of recognition and complained discreetly about it, when, speaking about "the new, inventive contribution" which would transcend "contemporary dilemmas," he noted that "in philosophy, he who walks outside the well beaten path, beaten by most within a given generation,... is considered not only wrong, and therefore without authority, but behind his times, where and when, in fact he has managed to be out front."²

This refusal of the well-trodden path Souriau has practiced doubly: both by the radical manner in which he repositied the problematics of knowledge and by the language he has chiselled to present (one could almost say to hide) his "new, inventive contribution." One must add that Souriau never opened a dialogue with his peers. He allowed those who became interested in his thought to evaluate the validity of his total philosophical vision in function of its most accessible (but limited) aspect: his theory of *instauration*,³ which holds that the dialectical process through which a work of art captures spiritual value and manifests it to us is to be taken as a paradigm for the constructive process

of ontological thought. He never attempted to answer their criticisms⁴ by explaining that his methodology, as ontological rehabilitation of the act of knowing, is epistemologically valid only when grounded within a new apperception of the empirical bases of the phenomenon of ideation.

I would like to add here that Souriau's innovative contribution to the solution of contemporary dilemmas has not passed completely unnoticed. F. Sciacca, in *La Filosofia Oggi* (1954), writes that Souriau, while "independent of all schools, is nevertheless inserted in contemporary problematics." Jean-Claude Piguet (*De l'Esthétique à la Métaphysique*, 1959) says of him: "a remarkable ethicist...who is also the author of the most original metaphysics⁵ produced by contemporary France." Henri Gouhier writes: "His work has been misjudged. I believe him to be one of the very few metaphysicians of his generation" (letter to author 1981). And Mikel Dufrenne states that, while Souriau is known "by experts in the field" as the founder and leader of French Aesthetics:

He is only partially known, if known only as an aesthetician. One must not forget that, first of all, he is a philosopher. And one can say that his philosophy is radical: it posits, in the language of a cosmology, the question of being. A philosopher attuned to the *philosophia perennis*? Yes, and yet a philosopher well grounded in our philosophical actuality. But his reserve and his language have kept him so well apart from the main stream of thought, that paradoxically, it is only in retrospect that he will appear as actual. The patience of philosophy and of its history! It will retrieve a solitary thinker, abrupt as a cliff, to whom an uncompromising integrity forbids any concessions to fashion or to publicity. One will be better able to situate Souriau when one is able to judge the validity of the claims of those who pronounce themselves prophets of a decisive mutation in the course of thought.⁵

Whatever the reasons for Souriau's radical brand of philosophy being passed over by the main stream of contemporary thinkers, it is time for this passing over to cease. Not for Souriau's sake, but for our own, for the sake of the new direction his cosmological vision offers to those of us who refuse to accept as self-evident truths the thought that our world is a closed one, that spirituality is an epiphenomenon (the pitiful triumph of man's imagination) and that man himself is either "a useless passion" (Sartre) or "the joyful affirmation of the free play of the world without truth" (Derrida).

An attempt at presenting the philosophical scope and depth of Etienne Souriau's cosmological vision is a timely but difficult task...

Timely because, if proven empirically founded and methodologically sound, Souriau's vision could offer concrete solutions to epistemological problems left unsolved by contemporary ontologies. It could offer, through the new status it gives the Platonic Other, a very positive solution to the metaphysical problem posited by Sartre's identification of the ontological genesis of the world with "individual processes which have given birth to this world as a concrete and particular totality."⁷ It could also provide the "missing link" in Merleau-Ponty's ontology, the interval wherein thought is born: "the fundamentally obscure operation which enables us to immortalize within us a moment of fleeting life."⁸ It could also provide the solution to "the epistemological problems whose solution dominates the undertaking" which Henri de Lubac regrets to find missing in Teilhard de Chardin's cosmology.⁹ It could also provide a cosmological grounding for Heidegger's ontology....¹⁰

Difficult because: entering Souriau's cosmological vision requires a radical revamping of some of the basic assumptions of the traditional way of thinking. Souriau asks of us "a serious modification of some philosophical ways of seeing" (AA 112). Those modifications imply a complete reversal of the traditional topography of the epistemological field, "a complete reversal of the orders, both philosophical and existential" (AA 111) within which the phenomenon of thought has been traditionally viewed (and therefore interpreted). Long before the current preoccupation with deconstruction and decentering, in fact since his very first book: *Pensée Vivante et Perfection Formelle* (1925), Souriau has been carrying on his own brand of decentering, searching for ways to disentangle the phenomenon of thought from the logocentric and anthropocentric assumptions which have traditionally either bound it into subservience to the *thinking* subject or exalted it into an ultimate equation with Being. Souriau's cosmological vision is basically very simple, a vision which, taking a new start within the Kantian position that thought is a strictly earthly phenomenon, posits man as "*fondé de pouvoir*" of a cosmos blossoming into meaning – a vision where, while if man is at the service of thought, thought in turn is at the service of the spiritual presence of Being manifested within the cosmically given – a vision where it is the questioning power of this presence which triggers the advent of thought as a terrestrial answer to this questioning presence. Thus it is within an "empiricism of the transcendental"¹¹ that Souriau perceives the coming-into-its-own of

thought as a cosmic growth of paramount importance. This new view of the true scope and position of thought, which is simultaneously a rehabilitation of the intelligibility of the world as ontological knowledge rooted in being, Souriau works at justifying for us on different planes: a critical revision of some privileged moments of philosophy's history, an existential analysis of the empiricity of a lived experience integrally assumed, and a recycling of the Platonic dialectics of "faire-apparaître" as "invention" of an intramundane ideative order.

A radicalization of the Kantian reversal

Souriau accepts as irreversible the methodological progress brought about by the Critique: thought is a strictly earthly happening. Thought, which the Platonic-Aristotelian filiation had made into an absolute and that the Cartesian Cogito had lived as the subjective pole of a spiritual reality, is inexorably brought back to earth in the loneliness of a radical beginning. But, according to Souriau, Kant accomplishes only a half reversal by taking only half-measures. When Kant posits human understanding, face to face with the world, in the solitude of its reflective awakening: "By what right does he decide that the form appearing with the mind is immanent to it and proceeds from its structure?" (AE 391) – "the formalistic idealism of Kant is explained by his noumenal anti-idealism" (IP 117). According to Souriau, the full reversal Kant should have accomplished would consist in positing thought as a phenomenon *sui generis* (of which man is only the occasional cause) which draws both its form and its content from the existential complex from which it emanates. "Kant could and should keep it more in mind that form and content are correlative, not only (as he rightly insists) by the condition of the common act (as one would say in the Aristotelian style) in experience, but also by the impossibility that should follow, of positing one of the elements, form, as intrinsic to thought, and to expel the other, declared *per se* unknowable, into the realm of the beyond ... form is no more intrinsic to the subject than it contents" (IP 116). Kant carefully avoids to look within the empirical content for the possibility "of a relation of the 'I think' ... to a 'there is an intelligible quality' ... He would run the risk of finding ... this noumenal entity in a stage of virtual existence, of undetermination, needing to be cosmically determined within the sole perspective of an elucidation of the representation" (IP 118). For Souriau: "the form looking for its matter and the matter looking for

its form. The one without the other has only an obscure, unfulfilled, incomplete being. But let one seize the other, be firmly filled with it, mold it and hold it. Only this matters. And this is the *instant-that-is*." And "if the suitability of form and matter for each other was not posited outside the mind, the failures and successes of informative processes would be unaccountable." Yet "Plato can only be listened to by way of Kant... How vain is the lifting of one's mind towards a world of intelligible forms! It is only through the sensible world that we will find forms; for it is only there that they are in act." Yet:

If we know that Form, as seat of an invariable necessity, is for the mind as objective as matter, all we can say is that the mind is, in relation to matter and form, the *common ground* (le lieu commun). It is this part of the universe where matter and form possess each other actually. Outside of it we can only suppose matter as virtually in form (AE 392–303).

This formal virtuality¹² which Souriau attributes to the sensible universe prior to its realization in intelligible existence (Merleau-Ponty's *anté-predicative* world) does not imply in any way a lessening of the sensible world's ontic actuality: "Only the sensible world has the fullness of being; this world of matters plus forms according to matters; this world where nothing is in potency and everything is in act" (AE 392).

What Souriau wants to stress here is the cosmic advent of man's mind as thinking activity ("thought: the offspring of the world" according to Teilhard), as "*pensée pensante*," a thinking activity which he calls "*le médiateur plastique*" (molding mediator?), "a molding principle of a mutual adaptation of matter and form" (IP 309). He speaks of the "absolutely distinct character of the cognitive and of the spiritual, of the concrete activity of thought and of the spiritual fact which is its term and high limit, just as the material¹³ is its base" (IP 309). According to Souriau, Descartes' great mistake is "in the *Cogito* to have substantially identified thought with those laws of spiritual information that it ascertains, more than with those laws of situation and material concatenation, which it also ascertains" (IP 308). Within this perspective it is the act of thinking of the *I think* which is to be taken as the ontological act (in relation to the I).

I think, therefore thought exists ... and I do not think without my I being used somehow as a propitiatory offering ... without feeling the constraint of this purely spiritual necessity whose

triumph I feel within myself, in the very moment it rewards me with a little more reality. It is certain that there is thought, because it is certain that there is such a mediation and a place for it. It is mine, because it operates according to a particular mode of determination, which defines my viewpoint: my viewpoint (that is to say the viewpoint that defines me, and not the viewpoint that proceeds from me, since I would be nothing without all this) through which I constitute and consolidate myself – the singular and intrinsic viewpoint of the individual work (*oeuvre*) that realizes itself, within the instant in which I can say: *cogito* (IP 310).

Within this context, the spiritual concretization and consolidation of an individual thinking subject (and through him the world of “things” for which Souriau asks him to take “the existential responsibility”) is concomitant with the ontologizing process of the world. Within this perspective it is the plurality of ontological acts which posit and concretize the individual existent in its effort towards fuller actualization. It is through the mediating activity of thought that individual conscious entities become capable of spirituality, become spiritually alive:

It is not the I which engenders existentially and ontologically those thoughts, it is those individual thoughts which engender this I. This I is richer than those thoughts, since it spreads itself over them all, encompasses them and reveals itself capable of encompassing still more of them. But it depends on them for its reality. In fact where there is no thought the I is absent (AA 117).

Souriau’s revision of the Cartesian Cogito

Souriau attempts to justify empirically this abdication asked of the I in the architectonization of an ontological dimension of the world through an existential analysis of the Cartesian Cogito and of the philosophical implications (existential, ontological, spiritual) that the succession *cogito, cogitatur, patefit* posits for thought. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: “Descartes showed that the thought of seeing is more certain than the thing seen or the vision ... it became the sign and the trace of an infinite Being, of a spiritual positivity” (Vi 98).¹⁴ It is this sign and this trace that Souriau wants to preserve as the intrinsic valorization of the ideative process, while showing that they do not emanate from the cogito as “thought of seeing”, but from the “thing seen,” such as it posits itself prior to its “vision”, within the undif-

ferentiated and undetermined *given* of the initial lived experience.

The analysis of the *cogito* is “a way to see more clearly how a reflective consciousness (une fonction conscientielle) can be entrusted with the mission of manifesting an authentic dimension of the given” (OD 95), states Souriau and he adds: “If one wants to invest the *Cogito* with authentic ontological powers, one must reject the temptation of positing it as a strictly personal I” (OD 105). According to Souriau, Descartes should not have taken for granted that existence posits the I as common subject of the *I think* and the *I am*,¹⁵ because it implies looking at evidence from the viewpoint of an historified Ego:

I am I. But who is I? In the *Cogito*, as soon as the identity of the I is challenged, it becomes evident that the initial truth can only be accepted under the form: presently there is thought, therefore something exists. *Nunc cogitatur, ergo quid est*. But it is doubtful if even the *cogitatur* can be accepted as truly expressing the directness, intimacy and immediacy of the experience which is already betrayed by the word thought. One should not say *cogitatur* but *patefit* (it is manifest).¹⁶ And if one wants to determine this patuity¹⁷ in relation to the Cartesian *Cogito*, one can say that it is evidence itself, in as much as it is primordially constitutive of experience, and not ulteriorly abstracted as testifying: the testifying bearing on a problem of truth in the judgment, which reverses the order of things” (OD 97).

Evidence in as much as it is primordially constitutive of experience.¹⁸ *Patefit ergo quid est*. The whole weight of Souriau’s validation of a cognitive process, which is liberated from the subject-object dichotomy and geared to manifest an immaterial but yet positive and concrete aspect of the *given* (the recentering of the thought process on the axis of the instant-that-is), rests on what he calls the experience of the *patefit*. This experience, empirically grounded (as one of the vectors of an integrally lived experience), offers itself as the presential evidence that “there is something” as the “*punctum saliens lucidum*” which indubitably constitutes “a breakthrough into the purity of non-being” (OD 98):

The evidence of a flower in the grass ... it blooms in the spiritual content of this instant, so totally unwilling by me that it is as much a surprise as a testimony ... to the plenitude of an experience in which I am filled with something I could not have invented ... A god (so to speak) tells me this instant and all of its manifold implications¹⁹ for which I am obviously not responsible (OD 102–103).

And “such moments far from being conditioned by a soul [Sartre’s “for itself” as “the structure of being”?] condition it” (AA 116).²⁰ Such moments (as the cosmic appearing of a spiritual aspect of reality) become cosmically actual for us through the “it is manifest” as a “point of lucidity”. Souriau defines lucidity as “that which gives the lived instant at once the mark of the actual and the mark of belonging to us” (PC 220). This implies the recentering of the absolute beginning of consciousness on the axis of the lived instant. This lived instant, in its actuality of “instant-that-is”, Souriau perceives as the cosmic opening where the “noumenal” makes its “phenomenal” entrance into earthly existence. It is this phenomenal appearing within the *hic et nunc* of the spatio-temporal continuum that triggers the event/advent of thought as this initial conscious phenomenon: “The fact that a given be manifest”,²¹ this fact Souriau calls “conscience-luisance”²² (consciousness-radiance). He posits it as *birth* of the world to ideative existence and *ground* to its subsequent architectonization into meaning. Thus the waking up of pre-reflective consciousness as “conscience-luisance” rests on the actual breakthrough (the evidence of the *patefit* as primordially constitutive of experience) of a point of lucidity as concrete and positive evidence that a spiritual fact is becoming cosmically incandescent. “Conscience-luisance” is the fact that a spiritual aspect of the given is being made cosmically manifest — is expressing itself as phenomenally existent.

To strengthen Souriau’s case for an existential, empirical proof of a world of thought rooted in ontic presence (which could also be restated as an ontological proof of the existence of being) one should here introduce the movement of his existential reduction — where the phenomenon preserved in its existential tenor is at once an existential sanction of the ontic which it manifests empirically and the existential foundation of the ontological realization it calls forth.

Souriau’s existential reduction vs. Husserl’s phenomenological reduction²³

In order to preserve the existential tenor of the phenomenon, Souriau asks (on behalf of the phenomenon) for an “existential reduction, an exact antithesis of the phenomenal reduction” (DME 53). He reproaches Husserl’s phenomenology for putting in parenthesis: “the phenomenon itself, in its real presence and immediacy” and preserving only what the phenomenon implies and exacts as going towards something other

than itself, so that “phenomenology, in a sense, is the place where one is least likely to find the phenomenon” (DME 53–54). Souriau’s reduction requires a difficult reversal of viewpoint, since one has to give up the traditional starting point (object-subject), to allow the whole process of the elucidation (intelligibilization) of the world to depend on this initial appearing of phenomenal existing. Within Souriau’s existential reduction the phenomenon is perceived as “the manifest itself.”

The phenomenon is presence, radiance, a given that cannot be ignored.

It is and it gives itself for what it is. One can try to exorcise it of this irritant quality of self-presence. One can denounce it as thin, slippery, fleeting. Is it not simply a way to acknowledge one’s puzzlement when faced with such a one-dimensional existence? One can postulate, on its behalf and as backing it, something stable, something subsistant, some support (DME 49).

In fact it is the phenomenon itself that existentially supports its support by bearing witness to it. Yet to its support the phenomenon is more than a testimony: “it is a reward, a crowning. It is existential sanction”:

A technique of “faire-apparaître” (causing to appear) such as informs the experience of the physicist, as well as that of the mystic, is the art of connecting to the phenomenon any kind of ontic experience. From manifest, the phenomenon then becomes manifestation; from appearance, apparition. But it is through sharing itself with its support and giving it its indubitable patuity. Such is the phenomenon’s generosity (DME 50).

Thus to understand “the truly existential tenor of the phenomenon” one must avoid “conceiving it as phenomenon of something or for somebody.” One can then feel it “as upholding and positing, all by itself, that which can lean on and consolidate itself, in it, with it and through it” (DME 58). It is “existential sanction” of the presential evidence posited by the *patefit* and of the questioning power emanating from this evidence. Preserved in its existential tenor, the phenomenon can then be perceived as “the existence in patuity, existence in its lucid state ... marking a passage from obscure existence to manifest existence — a conflagration, an incandescence of being” (IME 50). It is the phenomenal *facies* of the *patefit* “which comes out of being as the point of the sword comes out of the sword” (OD 101). It is

It is “the presential light of being” (DME 50). It is “being” manifesting its spiritual presence and inciting the world to invent some existential modes of existence wherein to reflect its presence.

Such are the bases of an epistemology which wants to justify empirically the ontological tenor of a strictly terrestrial thought process. It is the phenomenon in itself, manifesting itself as a local and temporal opening within the spatio-temporal web, which posits its presential light as a focal distance. And by doing so it awakes the world to the evidence of being and simultaneously suscitates within it a desire for “this subtilized vision that we call thought” (Vi 210). This thought does not yet exist. This thought has to be created. As Souriau tells us, from the experience of the *patefit*, as a point of lucidity, to a “legitimate determination under the form of the ‘I think’,” there is “a dialectical distance” so much the greater — because it includes operations which are neither of the nature of being, nor of having or of willing but of doing (*du faire*)” (OD 98). This dialectic of doing, rising from being and leading to knowing,²⁴ Souriau perceives as follows:

Hardly has the primordial experience been established than its existence is already threatened. Within the very instant of its experience, already vanishing, it needs to be corroborated by the impact of another one, which will be the same and yet other. Thus, already the whole construct of time comes into play, at least as an exigency, in an experience still almost instantaneous, and practically bound up with the initial one. Can this primordial experience itself be separated from the call to a continuous incitement of thought? Yet, this thought itself can only be found in act, in intermundane space, in between those two universe-atoms of patuity. And illegitimately one brings it back to one of them, and specifically to the first one, in order to claim having found it immanent there (OD 98).

Thus, if it is the primordial experience which suscitates thought, this thought is not to be found immanent there. And neither is it immanent to the being of the thinking subject. Souriau declares that “if there are psychic beings, far from being the cause of thought ... they presuppose it, it enters into their constitution” (DME 70).²⁵ Within Souriau’s perspective, then, what is the existential status of thought? In order to understand the mode of existence Souriau grants to thought one has to introduce here Souriau’s dualism of the orders of existence.

Existence as given and existence as constructed

Within his frame of reference (strictly geared to what can be empirically experienced, i.e. metaphysical speculations are off limits), Souriau posits two orders of existence through which being becomes cosmically manifest: existence as *given* and existence as *constructed*. *Aseity* and *abaleity* – “with aseity one speaks of self-existence, independent and absolute in its mode, with abaleity one speaks of referred existence” (DME 35). Aseity is *given* or first degree existence; “each being finds itself initially placed in a given situation, a situation which it has no choice to accept or to refuse” (DME 46). In this order of pure existence “the Eleatic position is perfectly valid” (DME 29). And this “pure existence is self-sufficient in spite of the impression of flickering and tenuousness to which it reduces us when we reduce ourselves to it” (DME 47). This pure or first degree existence is at once “very rich and very poor” (DME 164). Very rich, because in this sensible world which “alone has the plenitude of being,” it manifests, as we have seen, the plenitude of an uncontrivable concrete presence. Very poor, because this manifest remains unheeded, remains a vanishing proposition, before the dialectical construction of terrestrial platforms from whence to actualize the qualitatively virtual aspect of first degree existences. Souriau calls those platforms, instaured through the dialectical process of the “faire-apparaître”, “plurimodal or second degree existences” since they exist only by virtue of an existence referred (abaleity) to that of first degree existences. Yet, if constructed existences exist only as second degree existences which derive their being from the *given* of first degree existences, this given in turn accedes to full cosmic existence only through the mediation of those second degree existences. It is only through the emergence of second existences that the manifest will become manifestation for us, will become knowable. The real has to be realized in order to become real (knowable) for us. It is within this context that Souriau posits the existential status of constructed thought: As the necessary ideative mediating ground through which first degree existences will be able to actualize the full potentials (virtual existence)²⁶ of their initially given beingness.

Souriau's revised version of Plato's dialectical genesis

"Constructive thought is not an illusion, it is a fact" declares Souriau.²⁷ He feels that the misunderstanding, the by-passing and/or the scorning of this fact is at the root of much of Western philosophy's misinterpretation of the true role and scope of thought in man's search for meaning. According to him it is the invention proper to "creative and constructive – 'poetic' in the Hellenic sense of the word – activity" (AV 167), which must be taken as model for constructive thought's technique of "faire-apparaître." In other words, the instauration of dialectics through which the work of art realizes itself as an answer to the call from a "virtual existence" asking for cosmic realization, can and must be a model for the process of ontologization of the world. The artist's "doing" is only the "occasional cause" of the work of art and in "the triumphant existence which the finished work manifests" (DME 44) the artist vanishes in order to let the work of art proclaim itself, itself in itself, an earthly answer to the call from the spiritual exigency which founds it and to which it bears witness.²⁸ Within this perspective, the *sui generis* character of artistic realization is an answer, through the instauration of a form, to a call from the beyond (the acosmic).

Thus for Souriau, the goal of aesthetics is much less a *communion* with the ineffable presence of the beautiful²⁹ than the positing of a real *communication* with a reality whose being is – and will always remain – exterior to an anthropocentric universe. The work of art is the *organum* which presents the evidence of Being to our earthly capacity for knowing. "Let's not forget that art is a true ontological experience: an exploration of paths which lead to a cosmos, from nothingness to an accomplishment in patuity" (AP 172).

Thus, it is to art as "mode, method and regulation of thetic activity" (IP 67) that Souriau links the dialectical venture of human consciousness, in its magnitude as constructive thought. And historically, he retraces the actual birth of constructive thought to Plato's dialectics:

If Plato had put the aesthetic act under the wing of Apollo, as creative art, instead of putting it under that of Eros as unifying love, no doubt we would have had, as early as the Socratic age, the first draft of the *Other Organum of thought* [emphasis mine], other, that is, to the one drafted by Peripateticism." (AV 172)

"Aristotle's logic asks: what proves a given judgment? Plato's dialectics ask: what is a given being, itself in itself?" (AV 171). Aristotle's goal is

the assessment of the experienced world by the judging mind (ideative knowledge as true – the *veritas in intellectu* of Thomas Aquinas?), while Plato's goal is the uncovering of the intrinsic truth of being (ideative knowledge as *truth* – the *veritas in re* of Aquinas?)

Intrinsic truth, truth of being, ontological knowledge as thought structuring itself as an answer to the questioning power rising from experience as “given” while preserving its empirical link with this given. Such are the potentials of Plato's dialectics “as an attempt by reflective thought to utilize the dialectics already tested by Art ” (AV 171).

Pure Art, the soul of the Platonic dialectis, is not the search for a truth which would be anterior to this search and its metaphysical key – on the contrary, it is the direction of this dialectical progress which initially defines and gradually brings to mind, that which can be called the real truth of the being thus instaured; which truth, far from being its law, comes out of, and results from this dialectical progress (IP 68).

Thus:

The constructive determination of the essence of being, through the Platonic dialectics, gets all its strength, all its illuminative value, from the very truth with which this being must burst forth (IP 76).

For Souriau, the fine point of Plato's dialectics culminates in a new realm of existence, the coming-to-be within the cosmos of a new order of reality, truth as ontological knowledge, as the blossoming (through the agency of man's constructive activity) of an essential aspect of the given. But Plato's “spontaneously practices an art whose key escapes him” (IP 81). He is not aware of the creative power proper to the constructive aspect of his unveiling process, he is not aware of the positive and concrete value of the ideative structuration of reality achieved by his dialectics, and only grants to it a “demonstrative value it cannot possess.”³⁰ Thus, according to Souriau, the Platonic Organum of thought was still-born because of Plato's inability to conceive that the purpose of his dialectical process is not to demonstrate (to bring about the recollection of ideative essences existing in an acosmic realm of reality) but to create a new cosmic mode of existence (to bring about the birth of ideative essences as an *original* cosmic contribution to the latent predicativity of the beingness of being). The *ethos* of Plato's

philosophy in which “the Apollonian principle is completely devalorized by the theory of the ‘divine’ model and its ecstatic contemplation” (IP 81),³¹ destroys the true impact of his dialectical method, (hence Recollection and the World of Ideas³²). Plato’s dialectics asks: “What is a given being itself in itself?” and in so doing opens the way to ontological knowledge as an answer to the questioning power of the given. But he does not follow through. According to Souriau, Plato’s constructed thought, as a dialectically contrived formalization of raw reality, creates a new vantage point from which to perceive the beingness of given existence (its intrinsic truth): constructed thought, as the creation of those perceptual forms belongs to *our side* of reality (the world of becoming). The thing perceived (in its actual intrinsic is-ness) will always belong to the other side (the immaterial actuality glimpsed through the opening of the instant-that-is). For Souriau, the justification of the dialectically constructed thought *as true* (as perceptual tool)³³ lies in its power to enable us to reach a new perception of our empirical experience, to see at the second power (essentially) through the building of structural platforms where being will reflect itself and become knowable (perceptible) to us *as truth*. This is what Plato failed to conceive: the constitutive and actualizing power of constructed thought as a mediating “middle” ground where “heaven” and “earth” meet and inform each other, and the ensuing genesis of an empirically achieved ontological realm of existence. There is no middle ground in Plato’s vision of reality, the dialectical process’s end product achieves no existential status of its own. True thought, dialectically determined, leads to the unveiling of being-as-the-thing-seen and becomes truth itself as the vision of being in its actuality (as the essential reality of being perceived by the soul). The dialectical scaffolding can be disposed of. And man’s soul is left to the contemplation of the World of Ideas (the Greek word for seeing: from *idein*), where Being is seen as truth in a realm unpolled by time, space and matter...³⁴

Thus, according to Souriau, Plato does not grant his dialectical process the existential status it in fact deserves – that of being the earthly advent of a new *organum* through which the sensible world blossoms into a new dimension, the dimension of thought. The notion of man’s mind – as the center of consciousness – as the “place of being” – where form and matter meet and where the mediating activity of “thinking thought” (*pensée pensante*) permits them to “inform” each other in order to achieve their ontological existence, escapes Plato. Sartre interprets him correctly when he states:

For consciousness there is no being except for this precise obligation to be the revealing intuition of something. What does it mean except that consciousness is the Platonic Other? ... This 'other' ... which has no being except in its being-other (i.e. which enjoys only a borrowed being), which if considered by itself disappears and which takes on a marginal existence only if one fixes his look on being... (BN 786).

It is this Platonic Other, perceived, in the Sartrean frame of reference (namely the dichotomy of the in-itself/for-itself) as "this other which is exhausted in being other than itself and other than being" (BN 786),³⁵ which, in the Sourialian frame of reference (the dualism of existential orders), is perceived as the cosmic emergence of a concrete and positive mode of existence (as the third term scorned by Sartre). A third term that will neither be Kant's *lexis* nor Husserl's *logos*, but a third term which (through the Sourialian reconstruction of the Cogito on truly new bases) "within the live unity of the *logos* and the *lexis*" will achieve "a full noetic fulfillment" (Aph88) and therefore will rightfully posit itself as a cosmically achieved *sui generis Organum of Thought*. Thus, within Souriau's cosmic vision, the Platonic Other comes into its own as a *bona fide* cosmic reality....

Conclusion

Souriau shares this vision of an ontological awakening of the world, made dialectically possibly by way of human creative activity (by instauring forms which enable us to "see"), with Mikel Dufrenne: "the intelligibility of Being consists primarily in the inhabitability of the world" (NP 234), as well as with Merleau-Ponty: "Being is what requires creation of us for us to experience it" (Vi 251). But if Merleau-Ponty condemns "the sacrifice of the Sartrean for-itself" and if Dufrenne searches for thought's foundations within "an empiricism of the transcendental", neither of them is ready to detach thought (as a process of world ontologization) from the human subjectivity which instaures it. To admit the *sui generis* quality of a thought positing itself as the flowering of the world into intelligibility, is to admit *true* thought as the intrinsic truth of being. It implies accepting within the empirical limits of lived experience, the movement of the *veritas in re* of Thomas Aquinas as ontological proof of an existential beyond.

Paradoxically, it is Michel Foucault who recaptures, within his own vision, the Sourialian movement of a *sui generis* thought expressing the being of the world. He too, like Souriau, goes back to a *res cogitans* brought back to earth by the Kantian *Critique*. Speaking about “the thought of finitude laid down by the Kantian critique as philosophy’s task,” he declares that “all this still forms the immediate space of our reflection,”³⁶ but on the condition of applying to it “a second critique of pure reason on the basis of new forms of the mathematical a priori” (OT 383). The spatio-temporal web which Kant posited as a common (but impassable) frontier between the order of the things-themselves and that of thought and its thinking subject, and which Souriau further posited as an open frontier-post where the ontic order incites the human subject (as “*fondé de pouvoir*”) to bring it into knowability, Foucault posits as the *inner limits* of the world and of its being. Within this self-enclosed finitude, Foucault perceives “man’s very being in its radical limitations” (OT 339) as “that dimension where thought addresses the unthought and articulates itself upon it” (OT 325). And within this perspective of a “dialectical game and of an ontology without metaphysics” (OT 340), “man’s finitude has become its end” (OT 385).

Thus, this ontologized world (Teilhard’s noosphere) which man, in the multiplicity of his presence within the space-time continuum, works endlessly at shaping conceptually, while keeping it existentially afloat through the web of its centers of consciousness — is seen by both Souriau and Foucault as a cosmic growth of paramount importance. But while Foucault perceives this ideative growth as an end in itself, Souriau perceives it as a means, a ground through which being can speak to man in a mediate way and thereby help him concretize and consolidate himself (Teilhard’s “personalization of the individual by the ‘hominization’ of the whole group” — the human phylum as a thinking species). And while Foucault’s man appears as a “strange empirico-transcendental doublet” (OT 318) who “historically accomplishes a bureaucrat’s task” (OT 327) — seemingly with no other personal alternatives than the anguish of a Roquentin, the boredom of Beckett’s heroes or Derrida’s “jouissance”; Souriau’s man as “*fondé de pouvoir*” feeds himself on the “manna” he has helped grow, and opens himself and the world of things (of which, as *res cogitans*, he takes the existential responsibility³⁷ to the joyful task of manifesting the actual presence of the sensible world *as truth*:

In the very actuality of this passing instant, do I have any other means to hold onto being, and to realize myself, than to realize this instant in me, with me; than to bite into the instant-that-is and to force it, itself for itself, to cry its name out loud and clear? (IP 369)

It is in the direction of the instauration of a *cogitamus* (the “Nous” as “pensée planétaire”) that Souriau foresees in *L’Avenir de la Philosophie*, the movement of philosophies to come. To this instauration, his own research already offers some solid ground on which to build.

It is my hope that this preliminary presentation of Etienne Souriau’s vision (of which many aspects have been left untouched) will rouse enough interest to lead to the reading of Souriau himself.

NOTES

1. *L’Abstraction Sentimentale* (Paris: P.U.F., 1925).
Pensée Vivante et Perfection Formelle (Paris: P.U.F., 1925), hereafter: (PVPF).
L’Avenir de l’Esthétique (Paris: P.U.F., 1929), hereafter (AE).
Avoir une Ame (Paris: Belles-Lettres, 1939), hereafter (AA).
L’Instauration Philosophique (Paris: P.U.F., 1939), hereafter (IP).
Les Différents Modes d’Existence (Paris: P.U.F., 1943), hereafter (DME).
La Correspondance des Arts (Paris: Flammarion, 1947).
Les Deux Cent Mille Situations Dramatiques (Paris: Flammarion, 1950).
L’Ombre de Dieu (Paris: P.U.F., 1955), hereafter (OD).
Le Sens Artistique des Animaux (Paris: Hachette, 1965).
Clefs pour l’Esthétique (Paris: Seghers, 1970).
La Couronne d’Herbes (Union Générale d’Editions: 10/18, 1975).
L’Avenir de la Philosophie (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), hereafter (APh).
2. “Art et Philosophie,” *Revue Philosophique*, no. 1 (1954), p. 15; hereafter (AP). All translations of Souriau’s texts are my own.
3. *Instauration*: term used by Souriau to designate the ensemble of the processes which lead to the positing of a being whose existential presence, solidity, and autonomy is incontestable. Souriau prefers this word to *invention* or creation because it expresses the idea of a promotion, as the action of an agent distinct from his work, which will ultimately exist in a manner distinct from that of the agent.” Luce de Vitry-Maubrey, “glossary,” *La Pensée Cosmologique d’Etienne Souriau* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1974), p. 221 (hereafter PC).
4. “Could one see some sophism in this crossing over from thetic existence to metaphysical essence...?” Raymond Bayer, “Les Idées directrices de l’Esthétique d’Etienne Souriau,” *Mélanges d’Esthétique et de Science de l’Art* (Nizet, 1952). (Translation mine.)
5. “Metaphysics since Kant, has assumed a new task, that of the relations of subject and object, of thought and being... Such is the fundamental question of modern philosophy.” Lalande, *Vocabulaire technique et Critique de la Philosophie*, p. 620.

6. *Pensée Cosmologique* (hereafter PC), preface, p. 2. (All translations from PC are mine.)
7. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Barnes translation, p. 788. (Hereafter (BN).)
8. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1962), p. 389.
9. Henri de Lubac, *The Religion of Teilhard de Chardin* (Desclée, 1967), p. 161.
10. "An ontology which refuses to be a cosmology." Mikel Dufrenne, *Pour l'Homme* (Seuil, 1961), p. 21 (PH). Yet "the house of Being" which thinking is supposed to construct could do with some cosmological foundations!
11. Mikel Dufrenne, *The Notion of the A Priori* (Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. 7. Hereafter (NP).
12. By positing formal existence as "virtual" prior to its ideative actualization, Souriau disentangles it from the role of efficient cause (genetic dynamism) assigned to it by Aristotle. "Forms (those spiritual facts *par excellence*) are the very conditions of lucid actuality as well as of reality (IP 17)... "Man does not create anything. Even nature does not create anything." The bud's blooming does not create the rose. All its material and causal conditions were there. Only the form is new. The innovation is immaterial and of course alone the immaterial is new" (IP 74). This puts into a new light man's cognitive activity as *tool* for a cosmic actualization of an immaterial but positive and real aspect of being, and leads to Souriau's notion of "surexistence" (which this paper will leave untouched). The formalization of raw reality is seen by Souriau as the building up of a world of constitutive forms that will not be constitutive of being (the Aristotelian fallacy) but constitutive of its cosmic manifestation (thus keeping its message live and spiritually nourishing).
13. "*Material*: Not to be confused here with the physical or the corporeal – is the material that which constitutes the matter seized by a form. This matter is the ensemble of the conditions that regulate the possibility, *hic et nunc*, of the actualization of a form. Some of those conditions are negative, namely those which render this actuality impossible elsewhere. They are the negative aspect of the existential reciprocity of things" (PC, p. 220).
14. *The Visible and the Invisible* (Northwestern University Press, 1962) p. 98. Hereafter: (Vi).
15. The Aristotelian tradition would suggest God as the ultimate object of the *I think* (the thought-that-thinks itself) and the Hebraic tradition would suggest God as the subject of the *I am* (I am who am).
16. "*Patefit*: Latin word meaning 'it is manifest' (*it* used impersonally as in *it rains, it happens...*). This expression is used in the critical reappraisal of the Cartesian Cogito where the Cartesian 'I think' formulates improperly a subject and the act of thinking; while the truly fundamental immediacy is 'there is thought'. The notion of thought is understood here as a dim (but radical) beginning of a new kind of cosmic reality. 'There is something' would express the essence of the experience, if one adds to it the possibility of perceiving, more or less (according to its presential intensity), the phenomenal aspect of the phenomenon. One could also say 'there is phenomenon'" (PC, p. 220).
17. "*Patuity*: term used by Souriau to designate the act by which the phenomenon (and all it implies) is in a state of manifest presence (luisance) and as such manifests itself for what it is" (PC, p. 220).

18. To be compared with Merleau-Ponty's: "it is therefore to experience that the ultimate ontological power belongs" (Vi, p. 110).
19. "The evidence of this microcosmos (the instant in patuity)" (OD 108).
20. "Within this instant so manifest and so intense, I consolidate myself; I find there actual existence and I drink it..." (AA 117).
21. "*Consciousness*: E. Souriau maintains distinctions between consciousness as: 1) self-knowledge, which constitutes a task of long duration, perhaps never completed, or at least never immediate; 2) the fact that a given be manifest (see *patefit*); 3) the existence and action of the individual form (soul) informing all that which belongs to a subject" (PC, p. 218).
22. "*Luisance*: in a conscious phenomenon, there is this truly constitutive quality or state of being immediately manifest; it is to indicate this status of manifest presence that the expression of "conscience-luisance" (radiance, glowing) is used, in order to clearly posit what one could call the phenomenon's phenomenal status" (PC, p. 220).
23. Cf. Merleau-Ponty's: "If being is to disclose itself it will do so before a transcendence and not before an intentionality" (Vi 210).
24. "*Knowing*: relation by which a thinking subject establishes, on one side a lucid thought giving itself as an answer to a questioning given, on the other side, a communication between the given and this thought" (PC, p. 217).
25. Souriau adds that the *being* of the thinking subject belongs "to this ontic mode of existence, which applies to psychisms as well as to reisms" (DME 70).
26. *Virtual existence*: the call for formal incarnation? "*Virtuality*: Virtuality is indeed a mode of existence – the value of an unknown is virtually posited by the equation which sets its value – and the effect also seems to be virtually posited by the cause. The way virtuality is distinguished from possibility (which is not an existence) is, that, in order to take place, it exacts some intervention from a free agent. A great part of inner life has a virtual status" (PC, p. 221).
27. "Art et Vérité", *Revue Philosophique* (Janvier 1933), p. 167. Hereafter (AV).
28. "A heap of clay on the sculptor's bench. A full, perfect, unquestionable existence. But not the existence of the aesthetic entity which is to come out of it. Each pressing of the hands, of the thumbs, each action of the boasting chisel is a move towards the completion of the statue. Do not look at the chisel, look at the statue. Within each new action of the demiurge, the statue little by little emerges from its limbo. It moves towards existence – towards this existence which at the end of the process will burst forth with actual, intense, full presence. It is only in so far as the mass of clay is intended to be this work of art that it is a statue. At first existing feebly, through its remote relation to the final object which gives it its soul, the statue little by little emerges, shapes itself, comes to existence. At first the sculptor only senses it, then little by little brings it out through each of the determinations he gives the clay. When will the statue be completed? When the convergence is complete, when the physical reality of this material existence and the spiritual reality of the work of art to be accomplished meet and coincide perfectly; so that simultaneously in its physical existence and its spiritual existence, it will be in intimate communion with itself, the one being the lucid mirror of the other; when the spiritual dialectic of the work of art impregnates and in-

- forms the mass of clay in such a way as to make it reveal itself to the spirit; when the physical shape within the material reality of the clay integrates the work of art into the world of things, and gives it presence *hic et nunc* in the world of sensible entities” (DME 42–43).
29. For Souriau, the impression of beauty is the *result*, and not the *cause*, of the aesthetic experience. The beautiful is in relation to aesthetics “not specifying but specified; the impression of beauty must qualify and vivify the whole of aesthetics. It cannot be its object” (AE 51).
 30. “Aristotle misinterprets the Platonic method, but Plato himself is not exempt from the misinterpretation” (IP 79). This leads to Sartre’s: “The upsurge of the for-itself starting from the in-itself is in no way comparable to the *dialectical* genesis of the Platonic Other starting from being. ‘Being’ and ‘other’ are for Plato, *genera*” (NB 787).
 31. For Souriau: “The tragic moment of Platonism is probably the one when the demiurge (in the *Timaeus*) calls for a ready-made model, and sets in front of himself the proportions of musical harmony” (IP 81).
 32. One must keep in mind here that the post-Socratic Greeks (the Platonic-Aristotelian filiation), having newly become aware of thought as a potent dimension of reality, became intoxicated with it and made it into an absolute – hence Recollection and the Platonic world of Ideas and Aristotle’s domestication of the Platonic Forms (essence: the substantial reality) as the power behind the scene which propels and justifies the “in-act” of genetic becoming.
 33. “Our ideative activity is a limited process which has its decisive moment in between its beginning and its end, which are the tearing away from, and then the return to, the world of things” (PVPF 4).
 34. In spite of the unabashed other-worldliness of Plato’s vision, Souriau feels that Plato’s methodological approach to cognition’s intelligibilization of empirical data remains more realistic than Aristotle’s. Ontological knowledge (as seeing) might become Truth as the fusion of the soul with being-as-the-thing-seen but a distance is preserved between the two realms of existence: Ontic existence as the self-contained actuality of being (as object of essential knowledge) and “seeing” existence (as the actuality of this essential knowledge). It is this distance that Aristotle does not respect. He annexes the world of essences attained by way of the Platonic dialectics, strips it of its independent status as Truth (as a true vision of being as known) and hypostatizes it as the active principle which, not only sanctions formal existence, but also sustains the genetic dynamism of the world of becoming. Aristotle’s solution leads to a more absolute idealism than Plato’s: The first mover as the thought-that-thinks-itself. This position sets on erroneous premises Western philosophy’s subsequent search for a resolution of the problematic of knowledge (see PC 35–40).
 35. Thus, within the Sartrian frame of reference, this “other” becomes the contested territory over which the in-itself and the for-itself will carry on an endless tug-of-war, with the eventual collapse of Sartre’s epistemology where man becomes a useless passion and God “un dieu manqué.” One could add here that within Sartre’s vision of “a prereflective cogito...as the immanence of self to self ... as the ontological foundation of knowledge” (BN 17), the notion

of an ontological processing of the world is hopelessly tangled up with the notion of self as “the absolute event that comes to being” (BN 787). But what are the Sartrean self-consciousness’ credentials as ontological foundation of knowledge? Sartre’s dilemma is that his individual centers of consciousness, as floating islands of live reflecting processes, *per se* have no concrete and positive anchorage except through the genesis of the world of meaning they generate. That is to say, *de facto*, the Sartrean individual self-consciousness *founds itself* in the very ontological genesis (the realization of the pre-reflective world into intelligibility) *it is supposed to found!* In other words: Sartre’s self-thinking thought can only think being (the in-itself) by way of the Other (the non-self), but within the Sartrean brand of dualism (the in-itself vs. the for-itself) there is no room for a Third Term, for the acceptance of the Other, as the cosmic emergence of a positive and concrete mode of existence which would be neither the in-itself or the for-itself (Souriau’s position!).

36. *The Order of Things (Les Mots et les Choses)* (New York: Pantheon Books, Random House), p. 386. Hereafter (OT).
37. “I have in front of me, while I am writing these lines, a garden with a palm-tree. This palm-tree, we have to admit, is unconscious. To the extent to which it awaits, it postulates a passage from its obscure being to a lucid mode of existence, it can only achieve this within a thinking being” (APh 258). “By the act of knowing, the subject modifies itself actively in order to become capable of the object... The object in itsthetic act, finds within the mind it reaches, the dialectic unfolding of its ontological destiny” (APh 284).