

Leif Weatherby, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ: German Romanticism between Leibniz and Marx*, Fordham University Press, New York 2016, pp. 462, \$ 35, ISBN 9780823269419

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Since Aristotle, the term “organ” has gained a massive common use. In his book *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ*, Leif Weatherby examines how the multiple uses of this word in German Romanticism played a major part in its plurivocity. Indeed, at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, “organ” already had a delimited content in different languages such as French or English. But in the German-speaking countries, a specific content of the word “organ” was still lacking. Thus, in German, “organ” is not frequently used and, when it is used, it may mean a tool, a mediator between body and soul, an operator between the parts and the whole, a distance between possibility and actuality, or a function-bearer (p.5). In other words, “organ” seems to be caught between the meaning of tool and its sense as a biological function (p.22). In this context, Romantics exploit the metaphysical, the methodological, the physiological or the epistemological meanings of this word and structure the “organ” a very specific sense. The Romantic treatment of this word is so specific that Leif Weatherby notes that we should speak of a “Romantic organology” (p.8). Hence, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ* deals with a semantic history of “organ”, from Leibniz to Marx, although it focuses above all on the Romantic period. Here, “by repurposing or ‘transplanting’ the ascent term ‘organ’ into a central functional term for a new metaphysics, certain Romantics attempted to reinvigorate speculation after Kant and provide theoretical justification for human intervention in natural and historical processes” (pp.22-23); the book aims to trace the path of the “organ”, through metaphysics, literature, epistemological, scientific, cosmology, cognitive or methodological conceptions. In other words, focusing on the Romantic elaboration of the organ allows us to refashion the contemporary natural and social meaning of this word.

So if we pay attention to the way Leif Weatherby understands the organ - as a functional structure, as a mediation between

parts and wholes, as a means to unite form with content and the general with the particular, as both a constructed and found object - then we may immediately clarify that this Romantic “organology is not biological” (p.33): the biological approach is part of the themes “organ” raises, but the development of the organic meaning is not based on the biological sense; it is not only based on a biological context. Such a stance testifies of a will to highlight the diversity of all meanings of the word “organ.” And such a stance also foreshadows the massive intellectual content of the book; the author clarifies with some digressions, takes time to contextualise, and puts one study into perspective by examining another. In this sense, in order to clearly trace Leif Weatherby’s main arguments, we will only closely follow the evolution of the meaning of “organ”.

Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ has three parts. In the first one - divided into three chapters - Leif Weatherby examines how the Romantic context of the word “organ” emerges from main philosophers such as Leibniz, Kant and Herder. In the second part - divided into four chapters - the author closely focuses on the structure of the meaning of “organ” in a Romantic context. And in the last part - divided into two chapters - he draws lessons from his study in looking at how the Goethe-Hegel quarrel and Marxist thoughts benefit from this organology and complete it.

Thus, considering that “the beginnings of the metaphorization of the ‘organ’ for metaphysics are in Leibniz” (p.53) the first chapter focuses on how Leibniz uses the term “organ” in a metaphysical approach. In Leibniz’s mature reflections, in the context of a pre-established harmony, organisation controls both the agency of bodies and souls. This organisation goes *ad infinitum* and so nature is full of organs. This metaphysical approach fits the epistemic assumption of preformation. So for Leibniz, “organ” has a double meaning - metaphysical and epistemological - but in both cases, “organ” has a force bearer.

Here, Leibniz emphasises his concept of organisation in French-speaking texts. Kant and Herder - the subjects of chapter 2 - also adopt a double metaphysical and epistemological meaning. But, for Kant, this double meaning also becomes an analogy for the critical capacities of the human mind. Indeed, the organ helps to connect the individual example with the general law; the organ is hence a tool, a means of research, that gives laws to nature. Here Leif Weatherby notes that we should speak about an

epigenesis of pure reason, considering that reason develops according to laws we cannot discover; here the biological metaphor works. But this metaphorology of the organ is purely methodological, such as the one which considers categories as functional parts, as organs, of the body “reason”. Here, “organ” is only a metaphor applied to the mind in a semantic transfer. Contrary to Kant, for Herder organology is fully ontological; all creatures are organic, the whole world is organic, consciousness itself is organic and even God, who allows the soul to meet its organs through an analogon, has organs. Here, the organ is ontological and “having organs” means having an expressive force. In this sense, cultures themselves literally become organic, such as languages, which are organs of reason.

Together with this *metaphysicization* of the organic discourse, “organ” becomes also quickly associated, in a proto-biological approach, with the developmental aspect of life (p.112); “organ” is the point where formative, structural and organisational approaches meet. But if the organ is literalised in the natural sciences, in parallel it is also metaphysicized again - for Platner for instance, the body is like the organ of the soul. Thus as the author concludes this chapter 3, “The Romantics began their intellectual works in this semantic confusion, and inherited its conceptual problems” (p.121).

Thus Leif Weatherby opens the second part - chapter 4 - with a very precise study of Hölderlin, who he considers as “the inaugural thinker of Romantic organology” (p.132). In the thought of Hölderlin, the organ is a finite synthesis of knowledge and so basically dialectical: organs are both structure and development, both form and content. This dialectical nature allows them to develop real contradictions in the world and to resolve them. And considering that this resolution occur both in thought and in existence, organs join judgement and being and produce cognitive objects. From one contradiction to another, the mechanism of contradiction gains a history and so dialectics come into being (p.160); the organ use creates metaphysical innovation.

For Schelling - the main figure of chapter 5 - organology also passes through dialectics. The organ appears like a tool for synthesising contradiction and resolving antinomies because it connects elements within and between orders; it makes the system work in making cognition of Nature possible. In short, organs are an organon for a concrete exposition in an aesthetic

product. For Leif Weatherby, this dialectical reading of organology peaks with Novalis - in chapter 6 - who writes “the most robust version of organology” (p.27) in his Romantic encyclopaedic approach. In Novalis’ reflexions, the organ is also considered as a hole at different levels: humans digest and degrade nature thought organs; human cognition creates a distance from the object that establishes an essential incompleteness in the universe; cosmological organs also result from the distance between possibility and actuality. With this *holeness*, organology administers the historical and the natural worlds, and the encyclopaedic study that it generates is also a system of organs. In this sense, the organ is the literal locus of bodily, cognitive, cosmological, and social-political force; it is the locus of all scientific or historical work that is to be done (p.233).

Thus, as chapter 7 concludes, we face in the Romantic period a generalisation of the “organ”. And in this organic globalisation, “organ” embodies the contradictory essence that governs the world. But in an epoch in which science increases, in which phrenology emphasises the attempt to apprehend mental contents via the brain as an organ, in which Oken extends his cosmology into an epistemology, or in which Carus makes life and organism synonymous, organs “have finally become the metaphorical bearers of life” (p.257).

This back-like on the centre stage of the biological meaning of “organ” ends the second major part of the book and opens the conclusion of the argument, namely that “organology is *transcendental* technology because it conditions all technological possibility” (p.308). In presenting the use of the organ, organology appears as the organ of the organ and so its study permits us to know this use. In this sense, chapter 8 approaches the (not so) different conceptions of organology of Goethe and Hegel, which generally consider organology as “a conception of the very content of being as the very for-in-development of the human organ(on) itself” (p.283) And chapter 9 broaches Marx’s economic metaphysics, which Leif Weatherby sees as “a kind of late version of organology” (p.318); here again, organology appears as a transcendental technology, because it is its study that reveals the relation between organs and tools, in particular their interchangeability in the modes of production, the humanisation of tools for work, or the use of the hand as a tool.

Thus, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ* is a very detailed study of the Romantic organology. This very rich examination of this organic plurivocity often takes the opportunity to explain the issues, specify the contexts or draw parallels between some out of the myriad of studied authors - pell-mell Leibniz, Haller, Blumenbach, Schiller, Herder, Schlegel, Kant, Kiehmeyer, Reil, Hölderlin... But at the same time, maybe this book fails because of its richness. In this sense, the fact that the book ends with an epilogue with no conclusion indirectly highlights the bulky richness of its content; facing such a large number of topics with so many authors and over a long time-span, a synthetic conclusion seems impossible. But without ending up in a religious silence, this book develops many observations or remarks that give pause for thought.